JOANNA

H. L. GATES

Helen Kamineu.
Jan. 5, 1927.

207

JOANNA

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Of the skirts too short and the lips too red and the tongue too pert.

BY

H. L. GATES

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Joanna and I have talked over the matter of who should be her Godfather and both have decided, because of a profound secret between us, that she and this account of her should be dedicated to

A. L. FOWLE

who encouraged her a lot and who always knew that in the end she would be a true American girl.

H. L. G.

New York—1926.

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PART I

JOANNA

CHAPTER I

THE SUMMONS

"BE good, little girls! Dab your noses and put on your smiles. 'Good Morning' is coming!" It was a wonderfully sweet voice, and solemn. But there was the flavor of a laugh in the mock solemnity. That was a trick of Joanna's. She had adopted it from someone. Joanna adopted all tricks of manner that promised to be successful additions to her own original store of them.

Obediently the young women who flanked Joanna behind the silk counter, a bevy of sheer, sinuous young persons made in variations of the incongruous pattern of the day, dabbed their noses, softened the craftiness in their too-wise eyes, and shaped smiles about their grotesquely scarlet lips. It was each day's preparation for what was a daily ceremony—the ten o'clock visit to the silk counter of "Good Morning."

"Good Morning," it may be explained, was in a more definite way Mr. Leroy Harkness, an imposing gentleman of sleek grooming risen to the dignity of a long tailed coat and tremendously impressed by his responsibilities as arbiter of the world's events; incidentally the autocratic Buyer who rules the destinies of the silk

department. Promptly at ten o'clock each morning—the store opened at nine—Mr. Harkness, freshly magnificent, tapped his fingers on the spread of the silk counter, encompassed each of the young women behind it with a friendly, condescending glance, and said to them collectively:

"Good morning!"

There was much rivalry among the servitors of satin as to which of them first would see "Good Morning" and announce his coming. And if, by any chance, "Mr. Good Morning's" eyes rested a little longer on one rouged face than on another of his silk counter nymphs, why, there was a full day's scandal ahead.

It happened often; too often. Joanna herself had been bothered a bit, of late, because "Good Morning" had fallen into the habit of looking at her more and more speculatively. The morning before she had decided she could not ignore that meaningful look in the Buyer's eyes any longer and had tilted her chin at him. She was prepared to do it again.

But, strangely, "Good Morning" was not approaching in his usual languidly majestic manner. His expression was stern, as if he carried new matters of importance. He didn't stop at the next counter but came right along.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the young person on Joanna's right; "he has a grouch. Somebody's in for it!"

Joanna struck her pose. Joanna had many poses; one for every circumstance. For "Good Morning" she had rehearsed a way of elevating her chin, putting

one hand to the back of her head so that her elbow and forearm would show off well, and fixing the other on her hip. The effect in her mirror had been extremely satisfactory. But her hand fell from her hair and the one at her hip flopped down suddenly.

Mr. Harkness had no good mornings for any of them. He walked directly to where Joanna stood and stopped, abruptly facing her. There was neither smirk nor smile in his half-closed eyes. Once he had interrupted an unfortunate shoplifter, and had looked at the trembling young woman in just that manner.

"Miss Joanna," he said, his words sharp and evenly cold, "have the goodness to go at once to Mr. Graydon's office. You are to be spoken to by Mr. Graydon himself. At once, if you please."

Pencils dropped to the floor behind the silk counter unnoticed. Eyes stared. Blank faces turned upon the startled girl. And she gazed into the fatuous face of the man across the counter as if he had woven her in some evil spell.

Mr. Harkness was no longer "Mr. Good Morning." He was an ogre; the serf of a tyrant and bearer of a tyrant's summons. He stood there, cold, immovable, piercing. Waiting; waiting for Joanna; Joanna of the gold-brown hair who had watched him on other mornings, to hurry away at this unheard-of bidding!

For, so far as the record was remembered at the silk counter, no other girl employee ever had been summoned into the forbidden presence of the "Old Man." It augured but one thing. That thing shaped itself in Joanna's mind almost instantly. She had offended a

customer; unconsciously, perhaps, but offended one; and an important customer; one who had the ear of the mysterious, unapproachable, thoroughly unknown "Old Man." And that meant dismissal!

The Buyer's fingers began to drum warningly on the counter. A summons to the office brooked no delay. He didn't know what the summons was about, nor why, nor how the "Old Man" so much as knew the name of the unimportant Joanna who, despite that gold-brown hair and the captivating poses, was, after all, only "Number 27 in the silks." Graydon, owner of the city's largest department store, was not the sort who knew certain ones of his hundreds of young women clerks by name. A few of the managers were that sort; not Graydon.

"I believe I said 'at once' Miss 27," Mr. Harkness repeated, icily. "I should advise that you interpret that as meaning 'now'!" And then he added the after-sting that brought a quiver to the grotesquely scarlet lips; a quiver that the girl bit at and repulsed viciously: "I fancy, Miss, the other young ladies will conduct the counter satisfactorily until you return from your interview!"

Joanna could have choked him for that. Even in her trouble she remembered the different tone of him and the different light in the eyes of him on the morning of the day before when she flushed under his fawning. He knew, she reflected, that she was going up to the taunting dignity of being dismissed by the owner. His code demanded that he have no considera-

tion for even such a one as she if she were to go into the owner's black book. But Joanna was Joanna.

"So sweet of Mr. Graydon to send you along for me!" she murmured. "We were discussing you just last evening, you know—Mr. Graydon and I. I was telling him what a nice little boy you are—and shall you run along now, or will you show me the way?"

If she was going to be discharged, she'd leave behind her something to be remembered by! She'd wanted a long time to shoot something like that at the supercilious "Mr. Good Morning." She gloried in the smothered gasp which choked in the throat of the girl standing next her.

Harkness snorted in the way buyers have before the ridicule of their young ladies and turned away. He would bandy no words; not with one about to achieve disgrace through the "Old Man" himself.

A torrent of condolence became immediately vocable. Joanna affected disdain and failed in the pretense miserably. The flirt of her slender shoulders was pathetic as she made her way along the counter to the aisle exit. She felt, but did not respond to, the friendly touch of gentle fingers on her arms and wrists as she brushed by her silk counter companions. She nodded silently at a florid but sincerely whispered:

"Buck up, girlie. If there's a row with the landlady before you land another job, I'll share up!"

And so she came at last, her brain battling with a frenzied parade of rapacious creditors; Cohen, who was threatening her now for the overdue installments on her last winter's fur wrap; the perfectly adorable

hat she'd bought yesterday and promised to pay for tomorrow; the woman who ran the hosiery shop who had refused to give her another pair of silk stockings until she'd paid for the last four pairs—so she came at last to the outer door of the "Old Man's" office on the uppermost floor.

Joanna had never seen Graydon, the owner. Few of the store employees below the rank of buyers had. He came and went through a private passage reached by his own elevator and opening into the street through an entrance reserved for him alone. The store tradition was that he was pompous, sourly grim and gray, eccentric and fearful. For such a tradition the meagerness of Tuesday's pay envelopes—their utter incapacity to cover the requirements of fragile lingerie, silk hose, natty pumps, twice a week manicures and bi-weekly supplies of beauty pots—was an ample foundation.

Harkness had emphasized austerely his "At once!" but Graydon did not seem to be in a hurry. A soft-voiced, efficient secretary, a girl who seemed somehow to be from a different world than that of the garish shop outside, smiled warmly at the pitifully defiant shop girl who stood at the office threshold and announced:

"I'm 27. Did the Old—did Mr. Graydon want to ask my advice about the business today?"

The secretary ignored the affectation.

"Oh, so you are Joanna!" she said, simply. "I sent Mr. Graydon's summons to your department chief. I don't know what it is, but I'm sure it's important. I'll tell him you're waiting."

Joanna, urged by the secretary, found a chair. Somehow the atmosphere of the "Old Man's" office worried her. It wasn't what she'd expected. Not at all in keeping with the most approved disclosures of old men's dens on the movie screens. And the secretary wasn't as an owner's office girl should be. Not even pretty. That is, not pretty according to silk counter standards. She was pale and needed touching up at the cheek bones. Joanna could have shown her how to lay on one of red, three of blue, rub it in, and whiten with Florette's pink. And she wore no bracelets or bangles or, even, dangling earrings.

Really, she must be stupid, that secretary of the "Old Man's," and with her opportunities! Still—something about her fascinated Joanna. "Miss 27" caught herself rubbing at her lips and wondering if she'd marked them too red that morning.

New doubts, new specters took their place in the parade that marched heavily across the shop girl's brain. The creditors, those inexpressibly little people who fatten on the meagerness of the shop girl's purse with exorbitant prices for flimsy things, dug in their prongs and faded away. They were now of the yesterday. For the first time—the first time that she could remember, Joanna, waiting to be dismissed for some unknown offense against some unknown customer, thought of tomorrow as it loomed within her own outlook. Dismissed from one store the others for a time would be barred to her. And she had struggled long to attain the opulence of salesgirl of the higher grades.

Had she been more accessible morally she would have been more prosperous.

But Joanna stopped short of a great many things; a stopping short too many people classing her as one of a genus—the ultra modern genus—would not have credited her with.

She counted frantically and estimated for herself one week of idleness without being too deep in trouble. Of course if the worst came to the worst she could pawn the fur wrap. Cohen wouldn't know.

But Joanna didn't want to pawn that coat. At any of the dancing places to which the boys took her it would be missed immediately. Other girls are observant of such things, and really a fur wrap is a necessary mark of caste nowadays. None of the boys would be coming around for her if she showed up any place with her old and unfurred coat. None, that is, except John.

John!

She'd quarreled with him only last night—again! She'd told him he was entirely too muggy to keep up the pace with her. Somehow the thought of John, with whom a quarrel was never worth a second thought since none lasted from one evening to the next, comforted her. She look suddenly at the "Old Man's" quiet, unimpressive secretary. She smiled a little, inwardly, with the thought that she, the secretary, would be about the sort of girl John pretended to want her to be.

Fancy the glorious Joanna with the shimmering gold-brown hair and the flash of scarlet across a field of velvet pinks, like that! She almost laughed when the

other girl, in response to the purr of a buzzer, nodded at her and said:

"That's Mr. Graydon. He'll see you now. Won't you go in?"

The vision of John and the silly spectacle of herself trying to be like the quiet secretary had cleared Joanna's brain of the imminence of tragedy. Her head was up and so was her heart when she went through the door and stood in "the presence."

She expected to face the living image of sinister cartoons she'd seen. When she realized that the elderly, rather portly, gray-haired man who stood behind a great mahogany table to receive her was the "Old Man," and that actually he was smiling across to her, she wrinkled her brow. Then a great light came into her mind.

So THAT was it! She might have known!

She was alert, shrewd, cunning, all at once. She braced herself for the fencing. The fur wrap could go hang. There'd be no difference between the owner who could summon her, and "Mr. Good Morning" who had to come to her counter with his fawning.

"Did you send for me? I'm from the silks—Number 27!"

Her very tone was a challenge.

The "Old Man" pointed to a chair. "Won't you sit down?" he asked pleasantly. "Twenty-seven stands for Joanna, doesn't it?"

She answered shortly, "Joanna Manners." She wondered how long it would take him to show his hand. Her resentment grew more bitter each minute. More

and more she was convinced that there was only one and that a commonplace motive for the genial reception of a salesgirl, and a pretty one such as she knew she was, by the wealthy, powerful owner of the store.

The man across the table settled himself in his chair and faced her. A curious expression played about his gray eyes.

"Ah, yes," he murmured. "Joanna Manners—I understood that was the name! Would you mind, Joanna, telling me where—and how—you live?"

Joanna narrowed her lids. "I live alone, and not in a palace, either. And the rest of it is, I'm satisfied."

Her employer seemed not to notice the irritation. "Then you don't live at home? Not with your family?"

"I haven't any family," she answered him, still biting her words. As an afterthought she added: "But I can take care of myself as well as a family could, and I do."

The elderly man smiled at this. He began to recognize the symptoms. "I am sure of that, my dear!" he said, softly. "So let's speak of your friends. What kind—I mean, have you many?"

She had caught that "what kind." She stiffened in her chair and looked him full in the face. She was embittered anew by that curious expression under his gray eyebrows.

"I haven't any friends, particularly, besides a bunch of boys who are as light in the head as they are on their feet, but if I want any more I'll pick them out for myself."

Graydon darted a quick look at her. He was silent

for a minute, toying with a jade paper weight. When he spoke he had resolved, evidently, to shorten his approach to whatever it was he had to say to the sales-girl from the silk counter who was not disposed to be humble in his presence.

"I must say that you impress me," he said, as if voicing a profound conclusion, "as one who would not hesitate to dismiss friends, if they were not invited." Joanna fancied that he was preparing a new method of attack. She built new fortifications around her scruples, and waited, craftily.

"You have read, I suppose," Graydon continued, quite slowly, as if he wanted her mind to follow him, "of Cinderella and the Prince who put her foot into the golden slipper?"

"Yes," Joanna replied. "I've read about it—lots. But I'm off the prince stuff, and I put on my own slippers, thank you!"

The "Old Man" dropped the jade paper weight, and rose. Joanna rose with him, but he turned to a window and looked out into the skyscraper maze that opened, here and there, to release a glimpse of an ocean liner plowing its way down the sapphire river toward The Narrows and the sea. When he turned back into the room Joanna stood by her chair, watching him steadily. He went almost up to her, so close that he had to look down at her, and she had to tilt her face to look up at him. When he spoke again there was a new note in his voice.

"We mustn't fence, Joanna! I didn't send for you with any idle pretense. I am to have the pleasure of

delivering to you a message—a rather interesting message, I assure you. Something has happened to you—or for you, that, so far as I know, has never happened to any girl—at least so unexpectedly. First, I am to hand you this."

The sense of impending climax suddenly numbed Joanna's brain. The manner of Graydon had become portentous. She stared, fascinated, while he turned to his desk.

When he stood over her again she took into her hands, wonderingly, a small, thin book which he silently held out to her. She looked up at him. He closed her fingers about the book and lifted its cover for her. A folded letter dropped to the floor. He recovered it and gave it to her, motioning her to read it.

She saw her name, with the store given as her address.

When she had read the first typed paragraph Joanna, Joanna with the shimmering gold-brown hair, clutched frantically as if with her hands to catch her wandering wits. One hand fluttered then to her throat. She swayed.

Graydon caught her by the shoulders and guided her as she drooped into her chair.

CHAPTER II

INTO THE KINGDOM OF MONEY

FOR a long time Graydon silently looked down upon the girl. She, too, was silent. The letter, with the small, leather-bound book, shook in her hand. She held it before her, an arm resting across her knees. Her eyes stared at the typed lines. Now and again she closed her lids tightly, shook her head ever so little, and parted her lids again, as if the words on the paper blurred and she straightened them out by shaking the confusion out of her brain.

Once she let her hand drop, and kept her eyes closed for what might have been half a minute. Then, with a suddenness that seemed as if she were clutching at a shadow she didn't want to fade, she brought the paper closer and read each line again in frantic haste.

As Graydon watched her the wraith of something very tender, and ineffable, hovered about his lips. Out of the eccentric pattern of the exaggerated type she represented, the excessively obtrusive "daughter of to-day," a new shape emerged.

For the moment he forgot the maelstrom that surged outside his office doors—the humdrum of bargaining on the great lavish floors of the department store. The girl, who was one of those who bargained, bargained her wits against the purses of housewives; bargained the shimmer of her hair and the brown of her eyes and

the curve of her lips against the world of which the crowds out there were a symbol, became a flower, a delicate, exquisite blossom that some irreverent hot-house trader had painted into monstrous gorgeousness for the jaded taste of fools.

The "Old Man," forgetting for the moment the fluctuations in the price of Manchester cotton and the season's demand for Highland plaids, pictured her as a rhododendron suddenly bewildered by a beam of sunlight breaking through a mist.

And then Joanna looked up at him. Doubts and confusion had gone. Her face was lit with the taunting smile of one who has solved a riddle.

"Somebody needs a doctor! Who's crazy, you or me?"

Graydon shook his head. "It's all very real, Joanna! You came in to me, a while ago, a little lady of very small estate. When you go out again, you will be a veritable princess in a kingdom of money!"

Joanna crumpled back in her chair. She brushed her forehead with the back of a hand.

"Please, Mr. Graydon," she pleaded. "Don't make a fool of me."

The earnestness, the seriousness of the man who confronted her puzzled her, and sent her floundering for other words. He pointed to the paper in her hand.

"Read it aloud," he said. "Perhaps the sound of it will help you."

After she had murmured her persistent doubt—"It says it's from a bank!" she obeyed him, mechanically:

"And it says," she continued, " 'We have the good

fortune to notify you that there has been placed on deposit with this institution, to your credit, the sum of One Million Dollars, in cash and securities, subject to your personal check and such other disposition as you may wish to make of these funds.

" 'We beg to say that this deposit has been made by a patron of this institution who has not confided to us the source of your funds nor the motives which have assembled them for you. We have not considered it necessary to inquire into these matters because of the identity of the depositor nor as to his reasons for the injunction upon us to not disclose his identity.' "

The girl faltered, and looked again at Graydon, who was watching her intently. The frown still wrinkled her brow. Her eyes still groped. "You see?" she argued desperately. "I told you—somebody's loose that ought to be in a hospital!"

Graydon pointed to the paper shaking in her trembling fingers. She read for him the closing paragraph:

" 'We are sending you, through your employer, your bank book with an entry of your account. We are given to understand that Mr. Graydon will amplify certain remarks included above. We trust——' "

Her voice droned off through the perfunctory assurances of advice and assistance. When she raised her eyes, Graydon had dropped into his chair across the table from her. She looked at him blankly.

Graydon spoke deliberately, choosing his words, as if conscious of his need to penetrate the understanding of the girl whose mind struggled against a portent that overwhelmed her.

"You may accept each sentence with complete confidence," he said. "The money is there, ready for you. Downstairs, at the curb, my own car is waiting to take you and your bank book to the bank. There you will sign your name, just a scratch of the pen, and the rest——!"

He paused, and his fingers again played with the jade paper weight. In that slight pause Joanna—the Joanna whose philosophies were fruits of many wisdoms—thought she saw the thing that for the time had been driven from her thoughts.

"She was right, after all! Only it hadn't come in the way she expected. A pretty little play with all its elaborate stage setting! A million dollars! A new kind of gesture made by some idiot who thought she wouldn't be 'wise' in time. A million dollars; then, 'the rest.' And then the pompous gift of money recalled as laughingly as it had been craftily given! Ridiculous!"

Joanna dropped the letter to the floor and rose. Her lips set into a line that was out of place against their penciled contours.

"Now you're getting at it, Mr. Graydon!" she exclaimed. "I thought there'd be a catch in it. What's the rest?"

The man only shook his head, rather sadly, as if he suffered a little before the spectacle of a girl, fresh and young and lovely, who must ever be on the alert for "the catch in it."

"There are no obligations," he said, still choosing his words slowly. "The stupendous gift is yours with-

out conditions. Is that the word you would have me use—conditions?"

Before this rebuff the girl again was speechless. Graydon went on:

"You may not even ask a question. In return, none will be asked of you. It is possible that you shall never know the name of your benefactor. I know his reasons. I know the motives. But I may not reveal them. I may only say, and I hope you will have a little trust in me, that you need have no trouble and that there is nothing unpleasant about your mystery."

Joanna sank to her chair. "You mean," she persisted, "you mean that someone—someone I don't even know—has made me rich and that I don't have to—that he won't ask of me——!" She could not go on. All her reasonings, her wisdoms, her safeguards were beaten away as if they were futile things. She heard Graydon say what still maddened her because of the puzzle in it. And it left her helpless.

"You will not be asked to give—anything!"

The office door opened. Graydon had touched his buzzer and the secretary entered—the strangely soft-mannered, unobtrusive girl in whom Joanna had first seen utter unattractiveness, but who had caused her to wonder, after a bit, if her own lips were not a little too scarlet.

On the girl's arm was Joanna's wrap and in her hand was Joanna's hat. It was the same fur wrap Joanna had thought to be in direful risk of the pawnshop. The hat was the one still unpaid for.

The sudden sight of the fineries she could not afford,

either to have or not to have, sent her into a torrent of hysterical laughter. Graydon gave the secretary a hasty sign. Both waited until the girl in the chair quieted, her laughter dying away in stifled sobs. The secretary moved toward her, then, and held her wrap.

Automatically Joanna drew the cloak around her slender figure. Then she fixed her hat. Suddenly she turned, faced Graydon again, and cried out to him:

"But what am I to do—with the money?"

Graydon answered in the even, curiously convincing manner that so completely baffled her: "That is one of the questions I may not answer. I shall be eager to know what your decisions will be."

The secretary would have comforted the girl; would have taken her arm and led her out into the store and to the street, but Graydon stayed her with a motion of his hand, as if whatever Joanna was to face, she must face it alone. Joanna groped her way across the office and the reception room. The secretary held open for her the outer door. For a moment she leaned against it. Before her eyes the busy people who hurried through the passageway between the partitions of the cubby-holes on the office floor seemed to be swimmers in a whirlpool. She felt that Graydon had followed her and was standing close. Without turning, she asked, her voice rising barely above a whisper:

"Which way do I go?"

A long time afterwards, when Joanna of the skirts too short and lips too red and tongue too pert had become a Golden Girl around whom a vortex raged,

she remembered Graydon's reply to her murmured appeal:

"I wish that I might show you, my dear; but it is every girl's burden to choose for herself. And as each one of you makes your choice the world becomes better or worse. You may go either to the right—or to the left!"

When the door closed behind "Miss 27 of the silks," Graydon asked the secretary to get for him on the telephone the bank whose letter Joanna had wonderingly carried away. "Ask that I have Mr. Eggleston. He is expecting a call from me."

The telephone conversation was brief. Graydon seemed only to wish that his friend, closest of the friends of his elderly years, should know that "she" was on her way to the bank; that "she" would be there in a few minutes.

At the other end of the wire Andrew Eggleston, a gray man who might have been molded from the same pattern that had shaped Graydon except that the lines of his face were sterner, the lights of his eyes less gentle and his gestures more spasmodic, would have had his friend say more. He was unhappy with his own curiosity. Andrew Eggleston, chairman of the board of the great banking institution, and himself one of the world's richest men, was totally unfamiliar with a sense of curiosity about the private emotions of one of his bank's patrons. Yet he wanted to know how "she" had received the news that "she" suddenly had become possessor of the not inconsequential sum of

one million dollars. He attempted to keep his friend, Graydon, on the line.

"What did she say? How did she take it? Did she—? That is—! Well, damn it, man! Is that all you have to say? That your sales clerk is coming down to get a million dollars?"

Eggleston's chief reputation in financial marts was for his irascible temper. He floundered dreadfully before the futility of spluttering into a telephone. But Graydon would not humor him.

"Her emotions at the moment, my friend, hardly are of much consequence. At any rate, I fancy she will not have recovered from them by the time she reaches the bank. Then you may estimate them for yourself."

The banker sought suitable phrases with which to express his irritation at his friend's reserve. Failing to find them he clicked his receiver abruptly. Also he relieved himself of a well-rounded, sonorous oath.

A much younger man, who idled in the embrasure of a window across the room, laughed softly.

"The adventure begins to interest you!" this other man remarked. "I hope, for your sake, it becomes worth while."

Eggleston glared at the other sharply, but deigned him no reply. He turned to the papers on the table before him.

Brandon, the man in the window, resumed his inspection of the panorama in the street outside. An observer, studying his face, would have traced on it the specters of cynicism and would have concluded that they stamped him as one who harbored the conviction

that he knew every sort of woman and classified them none too pleasantly.

The same analytical observer would have said of Eggleston, arbiter of many of the world's important affairs, that he was a man who had lived a life in which woman had been a useless ornament.

When Joanna was out of the presence of Graydon and the quiet effaciveness of his secretary, her dazed numbness quickened suddenly into a feverish excitement. That she had become a ghost in some fantastic masquerade she was sure. But the thrill of it made her pulses leap. She wanted to rush to the silk counter and confide her amazing mystery to her chums there; even to confront "Mr. Good Morning" with a pose that would achieve its climax with the banker's letter held under his nose. Then she decided that such a display would be premature. By this time she was at the street entrance.

The first test had come.

The "Old Man" had told her to ask the doorman for his car which, he had said, would be waiting for her at the curb. She decided to try it.

To her amazement the doorman, resplendent in his conglomerate livery, seemed to expect her. A wave of his hand brought the limousine. The "Old Man's" chauffeur held open the door. As she approached him, her eyes widened, he touched his cap. When she would have looked at her letter to find the address, he interrupted:

"I know where, Miss! Mr. Graydon gave me instructions. It's to the bank."

Never before, it seemed to Joanna, had a car taken so long to go wherever it was headed for. Yet, really, the chauffeur threaded traffic skillfully. Joanna's excitement turned suddenly to panic when she realized that her driver was holding his arm to ease her to the pavement with the arched stone portals of the bank looming in front of her. An attendant responded to a sign from the driver. There was a low word between them. The attendant touched his cap.

"I am to take you to Mr. Eggleston, Miss," he said with a deference which Joanna recognized. Eggleston, she understood, was the man she was to see. The utter drama of it all appalled her again. She looked into the chauffeur's face and caught there a gleam of understanding that, after all, she was just a girl of the shops whose tinseled glory, whose ornaments, airs and fashions were gaudy imitations of the fancied vogue of smart débutantes. She grasped at him as a friend.

"Tell me," she pleaded, startling the stiff formalities of the driver of her employer's private car, "what is it they're doing to me?"

The "Old Man's" chauffeur dropped his fingers from his cap and, in the face of this rearrangement of caste at its proper level, immediately unbent to "Miss 27 of the silks." He spoke confidentially:

"I'll tell you, Miss. I know nothing except that I was to bring you here to old Eggleston's bank. But this I'll tell you, too: if you take it from me, my boss and your boss is O. K., but if he's sending you in to see his grouchy pal, Eggleston, there's somethin' doin'. And when there's somethin' doin' over a pretty kid

like you, watch your step, girlie; watch your step! And maybe you'd better give me your number so I can call you up when I'm off duty after ten. You're the kind that looks too good to be true."

Perhaps nothing else could have so completely restored the equanimity of Joanna. Somehow it brought her back to a realization of her fitness to meet and conquer all things—either her boss's chauffeur after ten, or her boss's banker before noon.

All the confidence in the world clustered under the shimmering gold brown of her ultra-modish bob as she followed the obsequious doorman into the marbled vastness of the Metropolitan Bank and toward the door that bore the legend, "Andrew Eggleston."

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST CHECK

IN the great marble corridors of the banking institution, one of the principal hubs around which the financial affairs of a nation revolved, "Miss 27 of the silks" felt very small and useless indeed. Something of the same sense of the futilities and all her pretenses, her struggles to impress the world as one who had many more, oh, many more pairs of sheer silk hose than the one pair she really had, settled down upon her.

For Joanna was, deep within, matter of fact, materialistic. Once, no doubt, she had believed in fairies. A little later than that time, before both mother and father passed away from her, she even entertained some of her fairies in her own imagination, and peopled her dreams with them after the fashion of Barrie. But of late years the fairies had not danced in Joanna's soul. There was laughter there, and many, many dreams; but no illusions.

So Joanna, convinced against her wits that something tremendous was happening to her, scorned herself for admitting such a possibility. She wanted to catch her guide by the sleeve and force him to give her an accounting of his obsequiousness. But panic was not far from her weariness. Her breath began to come in tremulous gasps when the paneled door marked with

the name swung inward. She heard her guide announce:

"The lady you are expecting, sir."

She was conscious of someone sitting at a great black table; someone who rose and glared at her without speaking; someone who was very forbidding and, to the eyes of youth, very old and incapable of understanding any thoughts or emotions such as she might experience. In such a presence Joanna didn't know what to do. The man spoke her name. Surprisingly, just as it had been with Graydon, these pompous, important old men had voices that didn't rasp.

"Will you sit here?"

He pointed to a chair. Joanna, wholly helpless again, slid into it. After a while she realized that the man of whom she had heard so much as one of those mysterious money kings still looked at her; that he had leaned back in his own chair and was just looking at her with queer lights playing in his eyes and something about his lips that, surely this old man's lips were quivering!

It struck Joanna as screamingly funny. Not even the warning hand of doom could have prevented her, just then, from laughing.

Andrew Eggleston smiled, too. But it was a fleeting smile. He was instantly grave and forbidding. And Joanna was frightened again. She felt uncomfortable. The back of her neck burned as if someone were looking at it, or at her. She wanted to turn around, but merely moved in her chair.

The young man who still stood in the window em-

brasure at the other end of the room prepared to come forward. When he saw that the girl had not detected his presence, he fell again to his silent inspection of the figure in the chair whose back was turned to him. The unpleasant, rather cynical smile played again about his mouth. Occasionally his glance took in the other figure, the old man whose whim ruled banks and markets and fleets of ships and, as some people often said, the policies of nations.

It was Joanna who broke the sentient silence:

"Well, I'm here! I suppose you wanted to see me. That's what they said."

"It was a natural desire," Eggleston admitted. "It is not usual, even in this bank, for new accounts to be opened with a deposit of a million dollars. It is not an inconsequential sum for anyone."

Joanna couldn't stand it. "Won't you please give it to me straight?" she pleaded, earnestly, sitting forward in her chair so that her hands might rest on the big table. "Please!" she repeated. "I was all right when I got up this morning, and everybody else was all right, and there was never anybody in my family who went to the asylum. And there's nobody I ever knew who could leave me a million pennies, let alone dollars, except an uncle, and he couldn't because I had to dig up two dollars a week for a year to pay the installments on his funeral. And I want to get back to my job or old 'Good Morning'—I mean the department manager—will be as sore as a billygoat. I mean, he'll be angry. Please, Mr. Eggleston, what's it all about?"

The banker reached into his table drawer and

brought out a folded check book, the daintier kind that are shaped for the handbags of women. With elaborate care he opened the book, bent back the crease in the sheaf of checks which it contained, and, thus spread out, he shoved it toward Joanna's hand. From his pocket he took his own gold fountain pen, opened it, and held it out to her.

"Isn't there a homely saying that runs something like this?" he said: " 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating?' It seems that I have heard that expression, and it is very apt, though a little old-fashioned, perhaps. You may draw your first check for whatever amount you like. I will have the money brought you."

Joanna looked at the unfamiliar check book; at the fountain pen which she had taken involuntarily; and then at the banker.

"But where will the money come from? Who gave it to me—and why?"

"I am sure Mr. Graydon explained to you, or didn't he, that you are not to know the answer to either of those two questions—yet! Someone who wants you to have it; someone whom the bank and I know very well, and in whom we have complete trust, has put the fortune at your disposal. He has even directed the bank to replenish the fund if you have requirements beyond the initial deposit—until such a time as he may give further directions."

"You mean that after a while he will give me directions?"

"Not at all."

In the tone of the banker's promise, more than in

his words, Joanna knew that whatever might be the outcome of this fantastic conversation, she would not need ever to ask that question again.

"If your benefactor has directions to give," Eggleston went on, with the banker's manner of monotonous dwelling upon the detail of a financial bargain, "they will be given the bank, and will have to do only with additions to your funds, or the cessation of them. At any rate, the present deposit of one million dollars, which includes securities we shall be glad to negotiate for you should you require the cash, is at your disposition and none of it may be withdrawn from you. It could not be, in any event, as it has been completely transferred to your account. You must accept it, to do with it as you will. You will not be asked for an accounting."

"And it's really true that I don't have to go back to the silks? To my job at the store?"

Eggleston's smile was quizzical. "I should be rather astonished to know that a young woman with a million dollars in the bank's vaults was concerned as much with the selling of silks as the buying of them."

Joanna nodded. "If I really had a million dollars, you can bet the last shot on your hip—I mean you can bet I'd do a lot of buying, all right!"

"I wouldn't wonder!" Eggleston commented, shortly. Joanna looked up at him quickly, detecting the hardness in his voice. "Oh," she assured him gravely, as if to defend herself against his implied disapproval, "I wouldn't put it all into dancing pumps, you know!"

"What else?" Eggleston asked, quickly.

The girl floundered. She'd never thought much beyond dancing pumps and kindred things.

"What else, then?" Eggleston repeated.

There was nothing for Joanna to do but fall back upon her subterfuges. She had many subterfuges. They covered a multitude of a girl's needs nowadays.

"Wait until something like what you're telling me about really happens," she said, at last, brightly. "Then watch me!"

"Perhaps that will be the better way," the banker agreed, his voice still hard in the unpleasant way the girl didn't like so well. He pointed to the opened check book which lay forgotten at her hand. "It will begin to feel real, won't it, when you have filled out one of those?"

The girl's wits swam again. She picked up the book of long, slender leaves, and examined it curiously. Here, at her finger tips, would be the test—the test of the impossible dream these two old men, her employer, Graydon, and his friend, Eggleston, were pulling her into. She clutched at an obvious excuse to postpone what she was convinced would be the tumbling down of the house of cards.

"I've never had to write out one of these," she protested. "I'm afraid I'd get it twisted."

The man who had been watching from the window came abruptly into the room. A sign, merely a meeting of the eyes, passed across the girl between him and the banker. Joanna turned sharply when she realized a new figure was standing almost beside her,

She knew, instantly, that she had been right in feeling an additional presence in the room. When she looked up into the newcomer's face a sudden fear, a sense of danger, tingled in her nerves. She had met many men in whose slightest approach she always recognized a challenge and a raid against her battlements. Unconsciously she stiffened in her chair. But Eggleston spoke calmly:

"I have forgotten to present Mr. Brandon. He is very close to me, in a manner, and is interested in your extraordinary circumstances—of which I had told him. He begged me to let him pay you his compliments."

Brandon bowed, easily, his manner marking him immediately in Joanna's mind as one who could make devotions gracefully at any kind of feminine shrine. She reflected that he would be the sort that would dance well and say things that fitted the music.

"But I am going to ask Miss Manners if I may not do more than offer my congratulations," Brandon said, smiling down at her. "Perhaps she will allow me to help her draw her first check. That will be something I shall always remember—when she has taken her place among the hilltops."

Dazed again by the imminence of the test, Joanna obeyed him silently, the letters made by her pen running together in a black mist as he pointed out the place for her signature, the date, and—the amount. After one or two attempts, she signed her name to his satisfaction and her own. Then she wrote in the date.

"And now," Brandon said, softly, almost caressingly, "the amount."

She looked across the table at Eggleston. He

nodded. "Any amount you need—or that you would like to carry away," he said.

A wild impulse stirred Joanna's blood. She would make the test a real one—puncture the bubble with one stroke of her pen. Her fingers firm, now, a light of determination in her eyes. She would demand a sum which would—well, something would happen then.

Her pen shaped the line:

"One Hundred Dollars!"

Brandon laughed. He lifted the check, so laboriously—and then defiantly written out. He read the amount aloud. A twinkle came into the eyes of the banker at the other side of the table, but he said nothing.

"Let's try it again," Brandon said, looking down into the puzzled face of the girl. "A hundred dollars will hardly buy you—what shall you buy first, wasn't it dancing pumps, you said? Well—surely you will want more than one pair. Here, let me fill in another check for you."

He tore the paper, crumpled it, and tossed it aside. Pulling the check book to his own hand he filled in the money line:

"Ten Thousand Dollars!"

"There," he said, as he placed the paper for the girl to sign, "that will make a better beginning for you!"

The banker touched his bell. A messenger responded immediately.

"You will have this cashed at once," the banker ordered. "It is the first draft upon the new account of Joanna Manners. And bring the money here. She will want it immediately."

CHAPTER IV

A TRIUMPH AND A DEFEAT

WITH the crisp notes of her ten thousand dollars spread on the table before her, and Eggleston, the grave, impenetrable banker, and Francis Brandon, debonair, easy-mannered courtier of the new world into which she was being ushered, silently watching her, Joanna closed her eyes in quiet communion with herself.

It was real! The fantasy had become a chapter of life with "Miss 27 of the silks" lifted from the valley to the hilltops, where there couldn't possibly be any shadows.

Weakly, she made new battle for understanding, and again lost. They, those two men, one of whom, she was sure, knew the whole of the mystery, would tell her nothing. Brandon professed to know no more than she; he declared that the banker had told him nothing of the motive or the source of her sudden shower of gold.

"But," said Brandon, "you will not shut me out, I hope, from the rest of the wonders. You will let me walk with you, now and then, along your new paths?"

With the feel of her first money in her fingers, Joanna concluded that she must learn to have an answer for things like that. Men she had known were

not gifted at such sonorous phrasings. For the man who said: "You look good to me, sister!" she had her ritual. Something like: "Did you ever win any medals on your eyesight?" She wondered if there were books that taught the things that went with a lot of money. So, she was silent a little while. But Brandon persisted:

"I shall pay ardent court to you, you know! I shall use all the wiles of the fortune hunter. Perhaps I am first to enter the lists, and you will let me keep my advantage."

She felt that he was playing with her. Yet there was something sententious in his tone. She wished he hadn't come so quickly into her new scheme of things. She was positive that he was a danger; that she didn't like him. She made the only reply she could think of, and immediately knew that it was clumsy; that it didn't match:

"I guess you'd keep any advantage a girl would give you."

"You mustn't be prejudiced against me," he retorted, with elaborate earnestness. "I am your banker's nephew; he will give me a splendid—what would you say, reference?"

Eggleston interrupted.

"I imagine Miss Manners will want to begin readjusting herself. That will be a more pleasant task than skirmishing with you. She is a young lady of affairs."

The girl shot a grateful glance toward the banker. She liked the forbidding old man. She feared him because of the knowledge he kept from her, but she felt

that she could always trust him. She was puzzled, too, about the lights that changed so often in his eyes. When she looked at him quickly he started a bit, as if caught by some queer surprise. She wondered what he was thinking about when he was watching her.

But she must make the plunge. Go out, outside! These men would give her no help—Brandon would help her, but his very manner of easy gallantry put her on guard against him. His was the way "Good Morning" would adopt if he knew how. For one thing, Joanna had suddenly lost her respect for the importance of such personages as "Good Morning." Already aisle managers, department chiefs, even superintendents had become vague and remote. Summoning her courage, she rose.

"If you don't want me any longer, if I may go now, I guess I will," she said, faltering. "May I?"

Eggleston got up from his chair and reached his hand across the table to her. "I shall give instructions," he said, "that you may be brought to me at once whenever you wish to come to me—if you do. I hope you will let me advise you, as your banker should."

Brandon held open the door. Joanna was still uncertain of herself for a while. Then, without speaking again, she left the banker's room and went into the corridor. Brandon walked beside her. "You will let me show you to your car?" he asked, smilingly.

Mr. Graydon's car! Waiting for her! Now and then she had had the experience of a taxi waiting for her, on one of those rare cabaret nights when one of

the boys had succumbed to a lavish urge. Never "her car." She'd never thought of it before, but she wondered if women felt guilty when they'd left their chauffeurs standing a long time. Of course not. Foolish! She spoke to Brandon, who was guiding her toward the street entrance:

"I'll bet you're laughing at how foolish I'm going to be," she confided to him.

"I shall never laugh at such a delightful young person," Brandon assured her. "And if you are foolish—why not? You have acquired the right to be as much so as you wish."

"But I don't want to be! I want to act as if I knew what I was doing—and I can't. I'd like to go along as if I had hundred dollar bills brought to me with my newspaper every morning for breakfast—and here I am wondering what I am going to do with a fist full of them." Her voice dropped into a murmur. "Gosh! I wish mother, or father, were around the corner!"

Whatever it was that Brandon would have said, he didn't say it.

They had come to the street door and Brandon touched her arm to guide her across the crowded pavement to Graydon's car. But Joanna suddenly stood, plainly confused.

"Wait a minute!" she exclaimed. Then, smiling, wanly: "You see, I don't know where to go!"

Brandon seemed to consider this unexpected statement. Joanna was looking up at him frankly, not confidingly, for she wouldn't trust him, but in brave

effort to impress him that she was amused at her own dilemma.

"I don't suppose I'm expected to go back to the store," she went on, her voice quavering a little. "And there isn't any place else—except Mrs. Adams'—she's my landlady, you know. I don't want to go there yet, because when I do I'll go up to my room and cry like blazes. I'll put that off as long as I can—it spoils your eyelashes and, besides, it's so darned old-fashioned!"

"Do you then avoid everything that is old-fashioned?"

Again the girl was overwhelmed with a sense of distrust of the man beside her, with the conviction that, in some way or other, that man, a stranger of the morning, would be one of the figures of the fate into which she was so blindly plunging. She couldn't think of anything appropriate to retort—and again she realized that she must read up on how people with money in their handbags said things to other people who had money they didn't have to spend before they got it. So she replied a bit viciously:

"You mean something you don't say; I'll have to think that over. Now I suppose I've got to go—the Lord knows where!"

"It would be frightfully easy for me," Brandon assured her, "to suggest that I go along, and help you. But I know, as my banker uncle remarked, that you will want to be by yourself. I warn you, though, that I shall soon pay my court."

Because he smiled at her Joanna smiled back at him. She gave him her hand when they had reached the

door of her car—the door held open by the wondering-eyed chauffeur. Brandon asked if he might give her directions, "where to go," to the driver.

"Tell him to drive around in a circle till I make up my mind," she ordered. As they drove away, Joanna felt again that burning at the back of her neck. She knew Brandon was standing at the curb watching her car disappear.

And then began the readjustments of Joanna, around whom everything swam. The driver, his anticipations illumined by the prospect of that suggested call "after ten," boldly stopped the car when they had turned into a cross street, got down from his seat, and put his head in at the door.

"How about it, kid," he inquired in his most friendly and confidential way. "What did they put you up against?"

Joanna nodded at him, brightly. "Oh, a lot of things. This, for example." She had to show that bag full of bank notes, hundred and five hundred dollar bills, to somebody; and to somebody who would share her wonders. As well the chauffeur, who had at least put his telephone number at her disposal, as anyone else.

The man's eyes widened. From the bag, which she held open for him to look into, he looked up into her face—into the face to which had returned much of the alertness, much of the taunting challenge, that had made it a baffling ornament to the silk counter. But the man didn't smile with her. Instead, he stiffened into something of the attitude with which he met his employer, the "Old Man."

"Oh, I see!" he breathed. "Excuse me, Miss, for thinking you would bother with giving me a date. I might 'a' known you was bait for big fish only. Where to, did you say, Miss?"

Joanna snapped her bag. The lines that some of her boys would have recognized as sure signs of a squall formed about her lips—the much too-red lips.

"Say, you!" she said. "Take a look at your license. It's for driving, and it says nothing about fish. Just get along and see if you can steer straight."

The chauffeur was not impressed. "And where to, Miss?" he repeated, still very stiff.

"I'd like to tell you one hot place to go to, but you can go there when I'm done with you. Meantime, just pull up in front of my furrier's, will you?"

He touched his cap and received the address. "My furrier's" proved to be in a neighborhood not frequented by the most fashionable shops—in fact, by the most unfashionable ones only, those who dealt in installments. The name was Cohen.

Mr. Cohen came out of the back of his store in response to the clamorous clanging of the bell set off by the opening of his door. As was his custom, he had set his face into its blandest formations. When he saw that his caller was "Miss 27," his face became stern. He assumed his most relentless manner, and tinged it with suspicion.

"This isn't a holiday," he greeted the girl. "Fired?"

"Yep!" she returned, with a brightness that irritated him.

"So that's how it seems to you, Miss?" he threatened

her. "Well, just hear this, you pony-up the twelve dollars that's overdue on that coat, and you give me two weeks ahead, that's twelve dollars more, or you leave the coat, understand?"

"Sure I understand," Joanna returned. "But if you've got time to put the conversation on ice for a bit, suppose you slip me that second-hand thing you've had in your window since your grandmother died—the one that looks like a good imitation of mink. If its not moth-eaten, maybe I'll take it along."

"Her furrier," twelve dollars her creditor, twelve dollars that he saw vanish in the abyss of a lost job, advanced upon her with his hands an eloquent announcement of a threatening torrent of words. But before the words came he glimpsed, through the glass panes of his shop door, the expensive limousine at the curbing. He gave a puzzled glance at the girl and saw in her a connection between the automobile and her absence from the store.

"How do you like my car?" Joanna inquired, sweetly. "I'm having my other one done in mauve, to match the upholstery, you know."

Mr. Cohen's blandness returned. He nodded as if his wisdoms were satisfactory to him. Mr. Cohen knew many things that were, more or less, connected with his business of decking pretty young women in furs. He was paternal—almost overwhelming:

"I knew it, my dear! I knew it! I always said you was one who'd make her way in the world. The mink one, did you say? I'll make it a bargain because you

didn't forget old Daddy Cohen. It's straight from Fifth Avenue."

"Never mind the Daddy Cohen stuff," Joanna admonished him. "Trot out the wrap. I've been looking at it for three years now. I just want to get it out of your window—it's tired on the eyes."

Mr. Cohen was not to be bantered; even about the famous mink wrap he kept in his window in the daytime and in his safe at night—his one real bit of honest merchandise and his proudest advertisement. He brought the wrap with elaborate tenderness from its window stand. Joanna, her own cloak thrown across the counter, put on the coveted mink with true nonchalance. She found all sorts of fault with it, accused it of being not second-, but third-hand, and pointed out to Mr. Cohen a score of mythical moth nests. Then she announced, quite calmly:

"Just to do you a favor, you old skinflint, I'll take it along. I'm going to give it to my maid."

"Ah, yes!" the installment furrier retorted, with the smile of a trader who has traded well. "Furs for maids, that's the golden rule, my dear!"

Joanna knew the price. It had been displayed with the same pride as had been the coat in the window, "One Thousand Dollars." "And," Joanna remarked as she opened her bag, "Worth every cent of half that much!"

Mr. Cohen's eyes watered, gleamed and grew wiser than ever when the girl who owed him twelve dollars "back," and fifty odd to come on her last year's wrap, handed him three five-hundred-dollar bills, with an

injunction to take out the installments and a reminder that she could count change as well as he could.

As she turned to parade out of the store, triumphant in her first conflict with the unpleasant figures of her meager days, Mr. Cohen touched her softly on the shoulder. Reaching his lips close to where her ear nestled under her bobbed brown hair, he whispered:

"Maybe the rich gentleman will buy you another one, soon; maybe an ermine this time. I'll have one for you, cheap—right from Fifth Avenue."

Joanna turned upon him. "What do you mean, 'rich gentleman'?" she demanded, glints of steel emerging from her deep brown eyes.

Mr. Cohen, meek and apologetic, but insidious still:

"Of course, my dear, I don't know anything about a rich gentleman. But when a pretty girl like you buys one mink coat, she buys one ermine coat next, and then, maybe, it's sables. And that's the way rich gentlemans improve if you handle them right, my dear —they go from mink to sables, quick. I'll have the sable one, too, when the rich gentleman that I don't know anything about and won't ask no questions about is ready."

Tears, tears of rage, and something more, of fear, dimmed the deep brown eyes. Joanna went, stumbling a little, to her car. Before the chauffeur's formal stiffness, she shrank. She gave him a number and a street.

"It's where I live," she said. "I've got something to do there, and I guess I'll go and do it now instead of putting it off."

CHAPTER V

IN "THE DRAWING-ROOM ONLY"

WHILE the limousine moved along in the endless procession of its kind, out of the neighborhood of the little furrier whose experience of life in his own field had taught him that "furs for maids" inevitably meant rich gentlemen, and into the beautiful shopping avenue where the dreams of women find reflection in the store windows, Joanna tried to plan—and couldn't.

Her brain, always in tune with events of the moment, things that went on around her, was unaccustomed to the burden of anything that had to do with tomorrow, or with any deeper problem than the discovery of some new zest for today. Once John—funny old John, who had loved her for such a long time—had taken her by the shoulders, swung her around, put his hand under her chin and forced it up so that she had to look up into his face, and had asked:

"Will you really marry me, Joanna?"

And she had said, "Sure!"

What else was there to say? What else to think about? Ready any time he was. But John asked her, then:

"What sort of a wife will you be to me, Joanna? And do you think I'll be the kind of husband you really want?"

And that was John's old-fashioned way. Mussing things up! As to what sort of a wife she'd be, how could she explain? She knew, deep down inside her, that she'd be a good one, but she hadn't been spending her time thinking up ways to explain why. Small chance! The wives she knew were the kind that men who weren't their husbands were always buying red flowers for. She had tried to wonder, once, why men bought red roses for other men's wives, but she had given it up. She knew why these other men's wives drank more out of other men's hip-pocket flasks than they did out of their husbands', but she couldn't have put that into words, either. And she knew, too, that these wives, whom she met at dancing places, at the cheaper and gaudier cabarets to which her boys could afford to take her, and at occasional beach parties in the summer time, were not the kind she'd be to John.

But how in the dev—the deuce, could she get all that into common-sense words? So all she could say to John, that time, was:

"You take what you get, and I'll take what I get, and whoever kicks first can take the gate."

Which made John say a thing or two she didn't like, and a quarrel was the outcome, and so that was that. She knew, perfectly well, what she'd do with fifty dollars all at one time. With ten thousand dollars she was as a schooner at sea with the masts broken down. With one million dollars—her head ached. Joanna wasn't any good, yet, at figuring things out.

Why? Who? What was the strange, astounding, unbelievable thing behind it? She'd always marveled

at the things people thought up for the movies, and for the plays. She'd even thought of herself as married to a Wall Street broker with an apartment on Park Avenue and a butler and a maid all her own. Girls had crazy dreams like that. But she'd never heard of a thing such as had happened to her. She didn't know what to do about it, except to go to Mrs. Adams, where she roomed, and, somehow, that was a waste of time. She ought to be out spending her money. But where should she begin? Let's see! First, now that she had the coat, she'd buy some—what?

Good Lord! With a million dollars everything she could think of seemed cheap and useless! And Cohen! He thought she'd fallen for a——!

Well, she'd get some flowers for Mrs. Adams, who had been worrying about her last week's room rent, take them home, sit down and see if she could think it over. Then she'd try to get that jazz mind of hers down to business and figure out what was to be what. She'd been let in for something by somebody for some reason or other, and while the going was good, she'd go.

Joanna didn't like the way the chauffeur acted when she rapped on the glass that separated them and, when he had stopped the car and put his head in through the door, she told him to stop at a flower shop. He was cold, and up in the air—as if he knew things. He said that she didn't need to rap on the glass; that there was a speaking tube. And he added:

"That's one of the things you must learn, since you've pulled the gears into high speed." She knew

what he meant and she wished she knew how to give poison to some people. She tilted her chin and told him she'd asked for a flower shop and not an education.

Roses? No! The last time she'd wanted a day off from the store, to go on an automobile drive with a fellow who'd got a car from somebody, she'd told old "Good Morning" that it was her birthday and she was having a party. "Good Morning" had sent her a bunch of roses as a birthday remembrance of his plans for her, and she had to listen to his soft stuff for a week afterwards—until she thought the roses were paid for. So she didn't like roses.

Lilies? They were what she remembered of her mother's funeral.

Geraniums? A long time ago, when she was a very little girl, she used to go out in the morning and water the geraniums in the front yard before she went to school! Gee! that was a long time ago! If there was anything she hated at that time it was geraniums, because they seemed to be such utterly useless things for a girl to have to put water on. But her mother had liked her geranium bed. That was about the time that her mother and father used to talk about her marrying the druggist's son, when he grew up. They were about the same age.

She was always in trouble in those days. She had to kiss the druggist's son whenever they happened to be together with nobody looking because he'd quit giving her ice cream sodas if she didn't, but she didn't like him. He demanded too many kisses for each soda. Ten cents apiece would have been cheaper, if she'd

had enough dimes. The fellow always passed her house in the mornings while she was watering the flowers and stopped. And she had to go around the corner of the house and kiss him or he'd charge her cash for her soda after school.

But her mother had liked the geraniums. So she wouldn't take roses or lilies to Mrs. Adams, but geraniums. Mrs. Adams was not a bad sort. If she didn't kick about her money maybe she wouldn't get it. The florist explained that geraniums didn't come in bunches, but in plants, only. "People don't buy them as cut flowers, you know," he explained. "They take them in pots."

"Well, here's where you learn something you didn't know," Joanna informed him. "Just knock the pots off of ten dollars' worth of plants, will you? When I want geraniums, I want geraniums. I'm different class from other people, you know."

Funny that she should think of geraniums, and her mother, and the druggist's son, because she had a lot of money in her bag and wanted to do something for Mrs. Adams. She'd forgotten what geraniums looked like.

But Mrs. Adams hadn't. When Joanna, overdue in her room rent, as usual, stepped out of the automobile, in front of the rooming house, something electric brought the slatternly but motherly landlady to the window. When she'd rubbed her eyes and recognized her delinquent roomer, she estimated the armful of flowers. Joanna and geraniums! And a limousine! What's wrong?

To the chauffeur, who helped her to descend and who took her bundle—the wrap she had put aside for the new one of mink—Joanna said:

"You may go back now to your boss. And if he asks about me—tell him I'll see him at church, will you?"

The man saluted. Mrs. Adams, watching from the window, saw it. Joanna suddenly was upset again.

"Say, you!" she said, her lips set. "You're just about the same as a new run in an old pair of stockings to me, but you're running the wrong way. We're saying good-by now, and we'll probably never say hello again, but I'd like you to remember that you were in on the start of something that's going to have a big finish!"

He made no reply, but just looked at her, somewhat sorrowfully. She added, irrelevantly, it seemed:

"And it didn't start the way you think and it won't finish the way you expect, take it from me!" Then, her flowers hugged close, she went to the house.

Mrs. Adams was a dear old soul, or a mean old termagant, according to whether one owed one's room rent or not. Not that she was so much different under the latter circumstances, but the general aspects of her seemed to be so. As a matter of fact, she was good for four weeks of arrears for any girl, and after that, why, as many more as a girl required if she was in real hard luck and actually trying to get out of it. Joanna, herself, had once comforted a girl friend, who had mortgaged her room rent for two weeks ahead on a dress she couldn't afford, with: "Never mind, dearie! The first week's the hardest. After that, she'll pray

for you, and I guess that won't do you any harm, either."

Mrs. Adams was breathless with curiosity when Joanna faced her in the drab room which gained its proper designation from the ironclad rule which the landlady laid down meticulously to each new lodger:

"My young ladies receive their company of the other sex in the drawing-room only." Her young ladies customarily referred to the big front room downstairs, with the two spindle-legged gold chairs and the three overstuffed things in faded red, as "the drawing room only." Joanna, speechless for a moment, shoved her flowers into the landlady's arms. At the same time she noticed that the old lady had taken off her apron. She'd never seen Mrs. Adams, except on Sundays, with her apron off. It gave her something easy to talk about as a starter.

"I didn't know it was you getting out of the automobile," Mrs. Adams explained. "And I wasn't taking chances. That's my rule; when an automobile comes to my house, off comes my apron."

She allowed a tear, or two, to escape over the flowers, marveling at the assembly of so many geraniums, also a beloved memory of girlhood, in one cluster. Then she was ready to be told about the car, and the absence from the store, and the reason for the gift of blossoms.

Joanna made her put the flowers in water, turn down the gas in the oven so that whatever was cooking there wouldn't burn, put the broom out in the hall so it wouldn't worry her, and sit down. Then she told her.

She began slowly, deliberately, with infinite detail,

an account of the day's events. She talked fast. She got up and stood in the middle of "the drawing-room only," and talked with her arms as well as her lips. She was just about to arrive at the bank, in her recital, when Mrs. Adams, who had been listening placidly, interrupted:

"Tell me, where'd you get that new coat, Jo? It's mink, ain't it? And it's real mink, too, or I've lost my eyesight."

"Sure, it's real," Joanna assured her. "It's the only real thing Cohen had in his shop—it's what he's done business on all season. Cost a thousand bucks, and that's what I'm coming to. When I got to the bank——"

"You say you had a thousand dollars to pay for that coat, Jo?" Mrs. Adams interrupted again.

"In five-hundred-dollar bills! Cohen's eyes almost exploded. And I've got some more in my handbag, and one of them's for you; but never mind the coat till I get out of the bank, will you?"

Carefully, with constant repetition, and with infinite detail Joanna completed her story. When she had finished she was flushed, excited, crying again. She'd rubbed her lips with the back of her hand so much in her nervousness that the scarlet was blotchy and the tears had played havoc with her eyelashes. She sank down in a chair and finished with a pose that she recognized as a good one, and one she'd remember for some future occasion—arms stretched down beside her and palms turned out with fingers spread:

"Now that's my story for you to stick to, and what do you know about it?"

Mrs. Adams didn't know what to know about it. When Joanna came to the million dollars, the landlady patted her hair and tucked in a gray wisp that hung down behind; but when the girl came to the end she was silent, motionless, and she kept her hands folded in her lap.

Joanna went over and kissed her on the top of her head, lightly. She didn't respond to that, which Joanna understood. It was a lot of news that had been thrown at her.

"Now I'm going upstairs and try to cry," said Joanna, gathering her new coat on her arm and giving the bundle that held her old one a kick into a corner, where she could salvage it later. "And if I can't cry, I'm going to laugh. If I can't do that either, I'll try standing on my head and see if I can figure things out that way." She didn't notice a sad little shake of the head which the landlady sent her way.

She turned to the door, but stopped, and opened her bag. She selected the crispest of the five-hundred-dollar notes, went over to the gray-haired Mrs. Adams, showed her the size of it and then crumpled it in the old lady's toil-worn fingers. Mrs. Adams, with wet, troubled eyes, looked into the girl's face, and would have said something, but Joanna stopped her by putting a hand over her mouth.

"Just keep the lid on the 'don't want to take it' stuff," she said. "I know you couldn't think of accepting it, and it isn't coming to you, and I only owe you

for two weeks—but I've got to give something to somebody, haven't I?"

She was going out the door when she stopped again, and turned around. Mrs. Adams still was looking at her, dully. She struck a pose that, she concluded, was particularly appropriate for the framing of a doorway —body leaning against one side of the doorframe, hand stretched across to the other, and her chin turned across a shoulder into the room:

"There's one thing you can do, Mrs. Landlady-mine," she said. "You can hold in the news till I get ready to spread it, and you can keep your other flappers out of the 'drawing-room only' for tonight, because my John's coming around on his regular date, and when he gets here I'll need the whole darn room for a lot of heavy stuff."

CHAPTER VI

REENTER, BRANDON

As a rule, Joanna ran up the stairs that led from the first floor of the rooming house, once a pretentious residence, to the second floor, where she occupied a one-windowed room made by a flimsy partition across what had been the dining room of more glorious days. But Mrs. Adams, who sat quite still in her chair in "the drawing room only," was conscious that she walked up slowly this time. She heard her open her door and close it softly, carefully. Usually Joanna slammed her door with a bang and a song.

Mrs. Adams examined her five-hundred-dollar note, turned it over and looked curiously at the yellow back; held it closely that she might read the various engraved assurances that it was a solemn symbol of five hundred dollars in real money. And she looked at the geraniums in the pottery bowl as intently as if she were counting the petals. But she was detached.

There always had been a soft spot in Mrs. Adams' heart for Jo. Somehow, this soft spot was hurting just now. Her eyes lit upon the bundle Joanna had kicked into a corner. That was like Jo! She'd leave bundles all over the house if they contained anything that had been supplanted by something new. The landlady regarded this bundle with something trouble-

some in her eyes. She got up laboriously. Beside the flowers she put down the five-hundred-dollar note. Then she went over to the corner and picked up the package.

For a time she held the parcel in her arms, staring at it. Painstakingly she untied the cord and unwrapped it. She folded the wrapping paper neatly and put it down. Then she held up the coat and let it open out.

This had been Joanna. The very breath of her; the zest and the pretense of her. It was imitation fur, but good enough to serve its purpose. Its lines had the swagger, even if its lining was only cotton. Mrs. Adams had marveled often at the uncomplaining patience with which a girl like Jo could put her hunger into a thing like this—the hungers of ten and fifteen cent lunches and scantier breakfasts. She shook her head dubiously. The trouble that had been in her eyes deepened to an inward sadness. She took the coat into her own room, laid it across the foot of her bed tenderly, and then brought the five-hundred-dollar note. This she folded and slipped into the handkerchief pocket in the coat lining. Then she sat down to think.

Upstairs Joanna was trying, also, to think. She sat down on the bed and put her chin in her hand, her elbow propped on a crossed knee. But the room imprisoned her too tightly. The walls, dotted here and there with photographs of boys, a movie star or two, and a framed lithograph of Niagara Falls, pressed in on her and suffocated her. She needed more space. With all that money in her bag, and with more—all

the money in the world, waiting for her, she must get out again; out onto the street where the crowds were; into the stores, and buy, buy, buy!

She'd never been able to buy, Joanna hadn't. Always she'd had to shop and haggle. The woman who ran the store in the office district where she bought filmy, sheer things of tinted crêpe de chines, she'd collapse when she should walk in, call for fancy sets with real handworked lace on them, the ones she hung in the showcases for the same reason Cohen hung the mink in his window. She'd go around there, now! Tomorrow, after she'd talked with John tonight, she could take an hour or two for the thinking.

She slipped out without seeing the landlady. At the corner she hailed a taxi and went, first, to the shop where the dainty things in crêpe were. But she was disappointed. The shopkeeper didn't collapse. The woman was calm, as if such a lavish purchasing were not at all unusual to one who dealt in such dainties. Joanna lost interest in the woman's wares. Suddenly this little shop, with the gaudy but enticing window displays, and the racks filled with billowy, soft things, in every conceivable tint and shade, became unpretty, uninviting. She completed her purchases and went out to her waiting cab.

She remembered her first picnic. Strange, how her thoughts were slipping backward during these hours! That picnic. Because she had been particularly good for a week her mother had permitted her to go with the other girls, older girls, without a guardian. And she was in such a stew when the baskets were spread

out and the girls and boys broke up into parties and hunted out the swings and wading places around the little lake. There was so much for her to do, so much sheer joy to garner in, that she ran about unable to make up her mind where to begin. She was like that today; but it was funny that she should remember. And queer, too, that today she had something of that same old silly feeling that had come to her during the picnic afternoon.

She had stopped for a minute, that afternoon between racing from one excitement to another, to catch her breath, and to say to herself, with childish earnestness, that she was glad she'd been good. Today, when she came out of the lingerie shop, she was glad, in a way, that she had been—well, perhaps there were no medals hanging on her soul—but she was safe in wishing her mother and father were where she could go to them today. They'd have lots of room to give her an argument, of course. About skirts up to the knees, and stockings so thin that her legs showed through, and about some other things, but she could look them straight in the eyes just the same. It would be so splendid if they, or one of them, could be here now.

This climax to her reflections, and her memories of the picnic occasion, revived the glow in the slim, eager body. There wasn't anybody to share with her, except John, so she decided to just let it go at that. He'd help her, too, to reason out something about the thing that had happened to her. She, by herself, simply couldn't.

By late afternoon, what with some hectic scrambling

into and out of her cab, she was ready for her descent upon the silk counter. She tried to forego that logical detail of the day, but couldn't. Courageously, she had slighted the shops and stores where girls of the counters and offices got their copies of Avenue modes. She boldly went onto the Avenue itself, even into the upper section where to be admitted as a patron is an award of honor which, earned, brings a marvelous deference, and where she was called "Mademoiselle." The result fell upon the silk counter as a sudden breath of some exquisite narcotic that sweeps the senses into appalling ecstasy.

Joanna had timed her visit cleverly; she appeared during the lull between the leisurely shoppers who finish early and the last-minute crush of the hurrying, belated ones. Trailing behind a spacious grande dame who was threading her way through the aisles, she suddenly stood at her old counter, but on the other side of it, her gray-gloved fingers tapping sharply on the polished wood in obvious imitation of "Mr. Good Morning." With her roguery dancing in her eyes at every face behind the counter, the faces of her work-aday friends, she purred, sweetly:

"Good morning, young ladies!" At that moment Joanna's voice was a silver tinkle.

Store patrons sitting at the counter turned curiously to scan the newcomer. In the attitudes of the girls who served them they sensed a drama.

It was Georgie, Joanna's chum and also one of "Mrs. Adams' flappers," who was first to find her tongue:

"Good Lord!" she breathed. "Look what the stork's dropped!"

Then there was a rush. Joanna, without ceremony, oblivious to customers with billows of varicolored silk in their hands, stepped back into the aisle and swung around for inspection.

"Miss 27" had been transformed into perfume, softness and delicate color; beneath her mink wrap she shone vaguely gray; smart gray tailleur that fell straight from under her shoulders, but hugged her hips; skirt that dropped in straight lines without a touch of trimming or vagrant pleats or colors; a thing that was infinitely and expensively "Avenue"; gray sheer hose of a quality that echoed in the very souls of Georgie and the rest! Slippers! Slippers that were wondrous things of some skin with the sheen of gray velvet! A ravishing little hat, gray with a splash of scarlet at the side. Georgie estimated the very simplicities of that hat as next door to being priceless.

A single flower, but that one an orchid, nestled at Joanna's waist.

There was an immediate babel of voices, punctuated presently by the sharp reminder of an impatient customer that there were those with wants to be attended to.

"So you weren't fired after all?" Georgie exclaimed, when she had summoned her wits. "Here we've been picking out the hymns for your funeral all day and you—you've pulled off whatever you've pulled off. Let the tidings loose, Jo! What's what—and who?" Georgie's tone had dropped to the confidential level.

Joanna's eyes narrowed immediately. There were times when Joanna could remind one of a lynx. This was one of them.

"Drop the 'who' thing, Georgie!" she warned.

Georgie stared at her. "Well, for the love of—!" The girl on the other side of the counter, on the outside now, interrupted sharply. "Yes, that's what I said. You're plugging in on the wrong line."

She had intended to let "Mr. Good Morning" feast his eyes, also, but suddenly she lost zest for her play. She swung smartly about and, without so much as a nod, leaving an endless volley of questions completely unanswered, elbowed her way into the street.

She had thought of going up to let Mr. Graydon see her, and to ask of him some more wild questions, but she forgot.

Why did everyone, even Georgie, who, out of some very definite understanding between them should know her pretty well—why did all of them think things? What was wrong with the world, the whole world? Was there no one who really knew about a girl? Not even any other girl?

Something very profound was stirring down below the surface of the deep brown eyes of Joanna, but it was still too abstract a confusion for her to grapple with. She was singing again when she reached home. The world, for some unfathomable reason, had picked her out to be good to.

When Georgie arrived, breathless from her rush from the store, Joanna was in the midst of her

feverish unpacking of boxes. She had forgotten her pique, and Georgie had forgotten her offense apparently. She plunged in to help, vainly trying to get in questions between her squeals of delight over the procession of surprising new things. Whatever pertinent queries she had treasured up against opportunity to voice them, were effectually silenced when Joanna remarked:

"Lay off tomorrow, Georgie! Get sick or have a tumor or something. I'm going to take you to a place I found today and buy you some real things—whatever you want. But you've got to wear your dresses looser, little daughter. That black satin you affect is all right, I guess, but when you get the real things that have some honest-to-goodness style in them, why, you won't need to wear them skimpy just to show how you're made. If you don't know what I mean, stay awake nights and think it over. I'm giving you something straight."

"So straight it sounds like a sermon to me," the other girl retorted. "And this isn't Sunday, either. But you've got a license all right, I suppose." It was a sententious finish, but Joanna preferred not to take it up.

Joanna heard Mrs. Adams through half opened doors tell other girls in the house that the "drawing room only" had been assigned for the evening, and heard the flippant rejoinders that there were lots of other wide open spaces in the world. After awhile, after she had resigned outright one of her new gowns to Georgie as an installment on tomorrow's promise, she

thought she heard John come in. She listened, eagerly, lips hot, eyes shining, and body trembling, but there was no call from Mrs. Adams. She fell again to examining herself in her mirror, twisting and squirming to glimpse as much at one time as possible of her gorgeously soft and shimmering evening gown, out of which her throat lifted round and white.

She'd always had a frock without sleeves and a fairly low cut neck, but each one of them, modest eighteen dollar affairs, had made her hungry for something real—something that really would be a gown! At last! What the feel of that dress was to Joanna nobody but Joanna will ever know. She wouldn't admit it, herself, and it's the sort of thing that can be painted on a canvas or put into music but never said in words.

She heard the rattle of the door bell. She opened her door an inch or two. She heard Mrs. Adams answering an inquiry; and the voice she heard then was not John's, but the quiet, modulated tones of the man she had met at the bank—Brandon.

She heard Mrs. Adams' confusion. "Why, yes, I'll tell her you're asking for her," the puzzled landlady was saying. "But I don't know whether to put you in the parlor to wait, or not. There's someone—her friend, in there. I've just been talking to him about her. She doesn't know he's here, yet."

And then Brandon's smooth voice:

"I am sure we will get on famously, her friend and me. We'll talk about her, you see, if she is long coming down. I have brought her some flowers. Will you be good enough to hand them to her?" Joanna heard

Mrs. Adams herding him into the "drawing room only" and in her diffident, blundering way, mumbling an introduction.

So John had come in! She was right when she thought she heard him. And he and Mrs. Adams had been talking together, all this time, in muffled whispers, so she would not know—talking of her. And now Brandon, a man who, she thought, knew what was a secret from her, had come as he had lightly threatened, and John would see him. Brandon and John! She wanted to keep John. She'd never realized before, how much.

She didn't know why, but Joanna was afraid, as she went downstairs; so soft, and young and beautiful in her costly new gown, and so flushed from the day's events; afraid.

CHAPTER VII

AN ALABASTER BOX IS BROKEN

FOR a brief minute Joanna stood at the foot of the stairs just outside the drawing room door. The eagerness, the exhilaration which had wrapped her face as in an aura, had gone out of it. She closed her eyes tightly, the gold of their over-plucked brows making thin, straight lines. She steadied herself with her hands against the newel post. All the doubts, the confusions, the mysteries and the stupendous wonders of the day crashed down upon her. A little while before she had reveled in her own beauty, and in the glory of John's surprise; his ecstasies, all the questions he would ask her and she couldn't answer. They would plan; she would be glad with him over every thought of the future either of them could conjure up. There would be no more tempers and insipid quarrels; no more fighting at each other. This time, when he put his arms about her, and kissed her, she wouldn't be restless and wish that he'd take her out into the lights, as other boys did, and romp with her through the flamboyant valleys of jazz.

That had been what she had looked forward to. Now, as she faced the door, with John just beyond waiting for her, and with the other man, whose very manner toward her was like a caress, also waiting, a

premonition stirred her. She felt, somehow, that her fate, the fate that had been so strangely brewed for her by unknown hands, was in there, in the hands of those two men, and that she was going in, now, to meet it face to face.

Foolish, of course!

She braced her shoulders and brought an arrogant dimple into her chin. Smiling, wistfully, she stood in the doorway. She had rehearsed, upstairs, a pose, something graceful after the fashion of one of the especially bred manikins in the exclusive shop where she had found her gowns, but she forgot it.

John and Brandon had been talking; that is, Brandon had been talking to John, easily, lightly. He was very handsome and graceful, in his full evening clothes. He appeared to be as much at home in the humble rooming house parlor as in a ballroom. Joanna sensed this; John, whom she had never seen in evening clothes, appeared ill at ease. She sensed this, too.

Both men gazed at her, silent for a moment, fascinated.

The lithe, slim figured and slim breasted girl, with the deep gold bob and the full-shaped Cupid lips, who blushed furiously and wondered what the strange sensation was, was very lovely. It was a full-toned loveliness that still was characteristic of "Miss 27 of the silks," but Brandon's appraising sense estimated quickly the effect that restraints would leave—the restraints that would come naturally to the girl—or that wouldn't come, according to the sort of her.

It was Brandon who spoke first. He moved over to

her and bowed low, with an exaggerated homage. "There is nothing so beautiful," he murmured, "as the bud that is bursting into blossom." He lifted her hand and kissed its slender fingers. Joanna could not help laughing. She'd always laughed, at the movies, when men kissed the hands of women. It seemed such a silly thing to do.

Her laughing eyes turned to John. They sobered immediately. John was not coming to her; not coming to take her hand and squeeze it, and say: "Some looks you've got on, Jo!" or something eloquent, like that. She took her hand from Brandon, who had held it so that her senseless fingers rested on his, and went up to John. When she reached him she realized that he kept his hands in his pockets; that he did not even go through the slight formality she might have expected in the presence of another—an arm thrown around her, a hug and a peck at the lips. He only looked at her, brooding.

"They have told you, haven't they, John?" she breathed, plaintively. "I wanted to be first to tell you! Isn't it wonderful?"

Unconsciously she put her two hands on his breast—the trick that always turned John's thoughts, whatever they were, into fondness. It was a good trick, Joanna well knew. She could never practice it with anyone but John. It invariably led to wrong things. But it didn't work this time. John kept his hands in his coat pockets.

"Yes," he said, his tone cold; "Mrs. Adams told me what you told her. I congratulate you!"

The girl started as if she had been struck. The carmine lips quivered. She stared into the brooding eyes that met hers so evenly. As if pleading for light, pleading for someone else to tell her why John was not happy, and eager, and excited with her, she looked across at Brandon. He was standing where she had left him, smiling, confident, watching with a barely restrained amusement. Joanna accused him:

"Have you told him anything? Anything that I don't know?"

Brandon was surprised by the sudden attack. "Mr. Wilmore seemed to know when I came. That is all, I assure you. He will say that I but expressed the hope that whatever was behind your unprecedented good fortune it would bring you happiness."

John flashed a glance at Brandon and then spoke to Joanna, his voice still hard. "Whatever there is for me to know must come from you, Jo. After awhile, perhaps!"

The arrogant dimples came back into the girl's chin. She thanked Brandon, in her self-conscious way, for his flowers. He took possession of her easily, and talked with her as if there was not a third person in the room. Once Joanna, remembering, turned her face, glowing again, to John, who sat moodily in one of the big red chairs, but he only muttered his reply to her sally.

Brandon led her to talk about her clothes—the marvelous things she had bought during the afternoon. He understood how to talk about such things, she dis-

covered. He complimented her upon her choice of the frock she had chosen to put on that evening.

"Really, you know, that is why I came," he explained, smiling frankly at her. "I wondered what sort of a change you would make in yourself, in the first few hours of such excitement as must have been yours. It must be very wonderful, to a girl, especially a girl who has had so little, suddenly to feel the possession of money—and such unlimited money. If you've ever had dreams you may now proceed to make them come true. Can't you?"

Joanna considered a moment, a frown across her brow.

"I can't escape the feeling that everything is not going to be right," she said. "It is foolish, I know. Perhaps that is because I can't believe things yet." Unconsciously she glanced at John, and nodded, ever so slightly. He acknowledged the look with:

"The world is made up of things that are hard for some people to believe!"

The red came into the girl's cheeks again, red that was deeper than the rouge, and her lips trembled anew. Brandon rose.

"I promise Miss Manners that I shall always be ready to believe—whatever she wishes to tell me, and that I shall keep myself at her feet, eagerly listening." Smiling down at the girl he murmured, softly: "Shan't we make that a bargain?" Then the caress came into his voice: "Shall we set apart an evening for the beginning of my devotions? Tomorrow? I petition most humbly!"

She hesitated, confused, her glance falling. She was about to turn again to John, but Brandon sensed the impulse and touched her wrist with his fingers. She shot her eyes up to his quickly. The touch burned her, but she decided instantly to accept its challenge.

He did not give his hand to John, but bowed. Joanna went into the hall with him. Quite suddenly he put his hands on her shoulders and brought her around until she faced him.

"Don't make mistakes, Joanna," he said, earnestly. "There's a destiny before you now. Your perspective isn't that of the shop girl any longer." Suddenly his lightness returned. She felt that the smile at his mouth was mocking her again, and that he was taunting her when he once more lifted her fingers to his lips. She tried to persuade herself that he was just a different kind—the difference of breeding, blood and association, from the boys who called her "kid" and asked for a kiss as soon as they happened to be alone. His difference from John—that puzzled her. For John wasn't like any of the other boys either. He always wanted to talk architecture when she wanted to dance. She guessed John and Brandon would be much alike if John had had the advantages of money.

The advantages of money! For John!

She hurried back to him; went up to where he had dropped back into a chair, and stood before him.

First, she must do the obvious thing—do obeisance to the etiquette of occasions where a new and strange admirer confronted an old and established one unexpectedly. Girls were always getting into such mud-

dles, and getting out of them. She tried to persuade herself that this was all that was bothering John—jealousy so profound that it obscured the larger events of the day.

"I didn't know he was coming, John," she pleaded. "I didn't ask him. I just met him today, at the bank, and I didn't want him. I wanted to be with you alone."

John got onto his feet, looked down into the troubled eyes, and pushed past the waiting form. He went over to a table and picked up a book and fumbled it a moment; then he dropped it heavily. He swung around and faced the girl who was watching him, her breast rising and falling slowly:

"Well, Jo! Give me the straight of it!" he demanded, quietly. "Mrs. Adams has given me the story you told her. We agreed, of course, it was fishy, but it may be all right for her. You owe me the truth!"

Joanna caught her breath. Her impulse was to cry out but she checked it. She felt her body growing rigid. She stared at the young man who leaned against the table regarding her coldly, cruelly, mercilessly. He who was the only link with her childhood, with her mother's geranium beds, with the school days and birthday-party days of the little town which had been her home—their home. He who had come also to the city to work out his career, and who had found her, sympathized with her occasional moods of loneliness, loved her and humored her tempers and her ridicule of him because he was so "slow," but wanted always

to plan with her the home they'd have for their very own, some day; that he would build and make a wondrous thing with his architecture!

"John!" she whispered, the low word moaning, as if it was a pleading out of her soul.

He nodded, as if he thought he had caught her thoughts, and, being what he thought they must be, agreed with them. She rebelled against that nod instantly, and called to him her protest:

"John! What is it—what?"

He didn't move, but spoke in the same even, deadly cold tone:

"You mustn't lie to me, Jo," he said. "These days are what they are, and the girls are what you are. Money, money that you can't explain, doesn't come that way—you know that when you can't explain it is because you don't want to, or somebody doesn't want you to. So drop the pretense, Jo, and for the sake of what we've been to each other, and what I've hoped we would be to each other, tell me—as much as you dare."

While the girl fought hard to ease the pain in her brain, he dropped his eyes, and a sad, quizzical smile touched his mouth. When he looked up he added: "You can trust me, Jo. I won't reveal any of your secrets, or anyone else's."

It was no trick, now, that sent Joanna's hands beating against his breast. All the trickeries had gone out of her aching little body. It was a girl who was maddened by the hurt he had given her, and who was fighting as a girl sometimes can fight.

"There is nothing more to tell!" she cried frantically, while her hands beat as if to drive understanding into him. "I don't know why the money was given me, nor by whom. You must believe me, John, and help me!" She hurried on, catching her breath when she could: "And I want you to share it with me, dear; it is for you as well as me. It will make everything possible for you, and you will be so big and successful; and we shall be so happy together—— You've lost your head, John—or you wouldn't think—you wouldn't think anything really wrong of me."

He caught her hands and held them so tight that he hurt. But she didn't wince; just waited, her lips open, her eyes hungry.

"I haven't lost my head, Jo!" he said. "It's you. And I was afraid. I was afraid it was coming; or something like this. I knew you could never wear your skirts up to your knees, Jo, and flavor your kisses with cocktails and be as you ought to be. A girl does those things for only one reason. You've laughed at me and called me a fool when I've told you that what you and your friends think is smart is only polished dirt. I wasn't old-fashioned, Jo; it was only that I wanted my girl to be different, and better—and safer. I could never get away with it, though—so whatever it is, it's happened, hasn't it?"

He had not raised his voice. He had kept his even tone. The sorrowful smile remained at his lips. Joanna was helpless; every fiber of her was wounded and useless.

All that she could say was: "You really don't mean

it—John! You don't think that I would—that I would be that way!"

"Think?" he replied. "Think? Why, what I am thinking is, that even tonight, when you must have known that you would have to tell me something, some better lie than you planned, you meet me—meet me with this other man here too—in a gown like that! Half naked! True to the last to the morals of your kind, and your crowd. Half naked—breasts, legs, the whole body of you flaunted like an advertisement."

She heard her own voice still pleading with him; but it sounded as if it were coming back to her from a great distance. The horror in her eyes had spread through her body and numbed it. She laughed, and cried out that he was playing with her. Then she fell into a chair and shook it with her sobs. But, so suddenly that it surprised the man who watched her, she got onto her feet and faced him. Her words were very distinct, now:

"You said, awhile ago, John, that you couldn't get away with it when you wanted me to be different than I was—than my kind and my crowd. Well, there's a lot more just like you! You didn't have anything to get away with. And you're not getting away with anything now!"

She thought, secretly, that he would protest, and that after awhile he would be himself again, and take her into his arms, and ask to be forgiven, and believe and kiss her. She would explain about Brandon, about Graydon and Eggleston, and he would enter into her mystery with her. But he went out of the room slowly,

put on his hat and coat, and shut the door behind him.

Joanna sank to the floor, in the midst of the pretty pieces of her alabaster box in which she had treasured the only jewel she had.

CHAPTER VIII

JOANNA DECIDES

AFTER a time the girl, huddled on the floor in a heap of bobbed brown hair and clinging gown and silver stockinged legs, stilled the birth of a new sob and stopped the convulsive tremble of her bare, velvet-soft shoulders. Her eyes, as quick to dry as to dim with moisture, which is the way of youth, selected a spot on the parlor carpet just beyond her toes and fixed on it. So she sat very quiet and stared, straightening out the jumble of her bitter, very bitter, thoughts. She realized that she couldn't think sensibly, for the things that had happened during the exciting day were not sensible things.

It was a trait of hers to rebel when things weren't right; she couldn't analyze or probe for reasons, or ask herself if she were to blame. That is she could ask if she were to blame when things got into a jumble, but her invariable answer was "No!" Time was when the spirit of Joanna was submissive and amenable to discipline and to the learning of lessons out of experience. That was a long time ago—before she had to make her own way about and compete with other girls, with the ones who were on the square as well as those who weren't. Gradually she lost her sense of submissiveness then. Whoever criticized her, ex-

cept herself, was wrong. As her tongue grew smarter, more and more accustomed to giving more than it received, and as her lips grew redder and more provocative, and her skirts became shorter, everybody—! People seemed to estimate a girl by the legs she showed, not by what she kept to herself.

Even John! The one thing she admittedly loved. He could never understand a girl—a real, square and above-board girl who had to fight like the devil to keep up with the other girls of this day and age. John had objected to almost everything she did or wore or said. He'd preach by the hour. Once, in this same parlor—this dingy, frayed, heaven-will-protect-the-working-girl "drawing-room only," John had brought her a lot of clippings from a newspaper. Some funny old bishop had said young women ought to wear mother hubbards or something like that; and somebody else, so old-fashioned that he read bedtime stories, had told the newspapers that in his day girls didn't take an occasional drink out of their partners' flasks.

Good Lord! In his day! He and Noah were so busy advertising a flood in their young days they couldn't appreciate having to take a nip of something else besides water just to keep up appearances. And John couldn't understand that neither she nor any girl she knew really liked the beastly stuff, nor cigarettes; simply had to go in for both or else go into dead storage.

John was wrong, then. Tonight, his insane suspicion of the money that had been given her for a reason she couldn't fathom, simply proved how wrong he had

always been—about her. And he wasn't coming back, as she was sure that he would when he slammed the front door. Always, their quarrels had ended in a kiss and a few minutes of wonderful silence very close to each other. Tomorrow, of course, she could go to him and straighten out his mind, easily. She could even take him to Graydon, or to Eggleston, himself. Then John would be contrite, they would have their silence together, and make their plans.

That was what she could do. But this had been a deep hurt. Being so utterly unjust, the bitterness of the wound was magnified by Joanna's admission to herself that other times she hadn't had near so much right to fight back. He'd come to her, now, would John. Come without calling, and say, "I'm sorry!"

When she had definitely sealed this bitter verdict in her mind Joanna was conscious of Mrs. Adams sitting on the sofa in a corner of the room. She had come in quietly and had not disturbed the reflections of the girl on the floor. Joanna smiled up at her, wanly:

"Funny, isn't it?" she said. "Everybody thinks things! It seems nobody can believe anything, these days, that's good to believe. About girls, I mean. First the chauffeur. He was earnest, too, because he thought he had a perfectly ripe date with me, and deliberately crabbed it. Then Cohen, who as much as told me that furs for maids meant crooked stuff. Now John! Funny, isn't it?"

The landlady, whose kindly old face was a mirror of her mental transformations, nodded her head.

"Yes, Jo, it's funny; but maybe it's not so funny, either. Sometimes I don't sleep nights thinking about you girls, you and Georgie and the others I've got and had. I've tried to be a mother to all of you; if you'd only let me, but you never will. Georgie told me day before yesterday, or, maybe, it was the day before that, that mothers were too old-fashioned for up-to-date girls to be bothered with. She said mothers who were any good were like flannel underwear. Wore well, I think she said, but no class."

"Yes, that's like Georgie," Joanna agreed from her place on the floor. "But I don't think she's really in—bad. She's in with a crowd that travels pretty fast, and she hasn't got enough sense to know when she's skidding. But you don't always have a smash when you skid, you know."

Mrs. Adams knew only vaguely what Joanna was trying to say. She'd given up, long ago, her struggles against the language of her young lady roomers. "Are you really sure, Jo," she asked, her words coming slowly, "that you haven't had, what you call a smash? All that money you had in your pocketbook, and you say there's more besides. You know——!"

Before the steady gaze of the girl on the floor the landlady faltered. The eyes that stared at her made her uncomfortable—uneasy with her doubts. "You see, Jo," she argued, plaintive in her self-justification, "the things a girl like you talks about, and knows about, and the places you go! Georgie wears her clothes too tight and she says that's what girls are supposed to do nowadays. And you wear dresses

that you ought to never cross your knees in—you oughtn't to sit down at all; it's worried me a lot. And you smoke, Jo, and I've heard you swear, too. That's why John was ready to believe——!"

"You mean that's why you believe, too?"

"I won't believe if you tell me it isn't so, Jo. I'll just believe in you and I'll take back the money you gave me." Suddenly the landlady was confused. "I'm sorry, Jo, but I put the five hundred dollars, and nobody knows what a god-send it would be to me, into the pocket of your old wrap. The coat's on your bed, now. If you say it came to you all right, like you said before, I'll take it, dear, and bless you for it."

Joanna scrambled onto her feet, straightened her frock, brought a strap that had fallen back, up onto her shoulder and, without a word, ran up the stairs to her room. When she reappeared she held the bill. She put it into Mrs. Adams' hand and folded the worn fingers about it. Neither she nor the landlady spoke. Mrs. Adams pulled the bobbed head down and kissed it.

"For once," Joanna remarked, when she straightened up, "I want a drink. I'm going to wait until Georgie comes in, if she makes it early enough, and if her boy doesn't get the air too quick I'll buy them a taxi while we hunt an all-night bootlegger."

Georgie arrived, early—one o'clock. Her companion of the evening was sufficiently equipped to supply Joanna's unaccustomed need and glad of the excuse for lingering over his dismissal. Joanna's bitterness was mellowed, but far from banished, when a streak of

gray, stealing across the court of sordid back yards, warned the two pajama-clad girls propped up in Joanna's bed that if they were to have any sleep at all against the excitements of the day to come they must get between the covers and trust to the housemaid to awaken them. Many houses they had built, some of stone that were destined to stand forever; some of cards that would be blown away.

With her awakening to the new day—the first full day of her new estate, varying emotions rushed in confusion into Joanna's mind. Her first thought was of John. With it came the surge of recollection of the scene in the "drawing-room only." She winced at the sudden memory. She would get hold of him right away. She wouldn't lose a minute—before he went to his work. She buried her hand in the hair on the pillow beside her. Georgie had stubbornly shut her eyes, refusing to be ordered up by any housemaid, but opened them wide at the viciousness of Joanna's tug at her shingled head.

"Pile out and get dressed," Joanna commanded. "And be quick—you can make-up afterwards. Bring some things in and we'll ask Mrs. Adams to let us cook them in the kitchen for breakfast. And I want you to telephone from downstairs on your way out."

Georgie, her wits not fully gathered, broke off short in a general remark to the effect that some people had their crust. Things came back to her, especially that she must send word to the store that she'd broken a leg, or her neck, and couldn't show up at the silk counter until the next day, and that Joanna was going

to take her shopping. She blotted out her first remark with: "Surest thing you know." And, in her own conception of the way people kept their affairs straight, she added:

"I'll make the telephone in about two minutes. What did you say John's number is?"

But Joanna decided she wouldn't telephone to John. Again she considered the hurt too lively, and bitter. She didn't want to ever hear from him again. Brandon had said she mustn't make mistakes. That her perspective was no longer that of the shop girl's.

Brandon! Who, and what, was he? He must be mixed up in this strange affair of hers in some way, but he denied it. She didn't like him.

Yet Brandon had nothing to do with her amended command to Georgie who had whistled her way into the few clothes she found necessary to wear and who was asking what she'd say to John when she got him.

"Nothing," Joanna replied, tartly. "I don't want you to call him. Don't be silly. I was only joking. Get the breakfast. Take a five-hundred-dollar bill and tell me what delicatessen men look like when they have fits."

Which Georgie gayly did. Her report was hysterically satisfactory, sobered only by the discovery that she'd been short-changed ten dollars out of the twenty dollar bill she had finally given him.

"Let him keep it," Joanna ordered. "It'll be something to remind him of the next time he refuses you credit."

"If you get me those duds you've promised me,"

Georgie returned, "I'll never look at a delicatessen door again. I'll get my herring and dill pickles at the Ritz. See if I don't. All I need is clothes to get out of the delicatessen class."

Joanna shot a keen look at her, but said nothing. John had turned her soul against preaching.

The beautifications that are suitable to new street tailleurs, Joanna's, which she had worn the afternoon before and which was her preliminary gift to Georgie are not hasty ceremonies. It was well toward noon when the two girls settled in their taxi. And then Georgie had to wait, a block from the store, where she would not be detected as having broken neither a leg nor a neck, while Joanna presented herself to Graydon's secretary. She just wanted to talk to him again, she explained, and to let him see her.

The "boss" of yesterday made her understand that he was her "friend" of today, and all days. He thanked her, gently, for stopping in, and hoped that she would come in often. But he would not give her the thing she asked. Advice. Something that would be a hint of what was expected of her; of what she should do to carry out the wishes or the plans of her unknown benefactor.

"I have been cautioned by your banker, Eggleston," he said, "that I must not pretend to advise you. Not now, at any rate. Eggleston is emphatic in saying that a condition that went with the money was that you solve your own problems. After awhile, perhaps some of the severity of the ban may be lifted. Just now I mustn't interfere."

"Am I just to take all this money and go out and spend it then?" Joanna persisted.

"Just go out and spend it—some way. I suppose that is one way of repeating that you may do with it whatever you wish."

So naturally that she did not know that she was doing it she began to tell him about Cohen and Mrs. Adams and John. Suddenly she hesitated, and was abashed. "But all that doesn't interest you, does it?" she apologized.

The gray man had been watching her intently. Almost eagerly. He reassured her quickly: "On the contrary, Joanna, that is just what—I mean, it does interest me deeply. Won't you go on—about John? You straightened him out, I hope, and it's quite all right, now?"

"No," Joanna replied, her voice quavering a little. "I didn't, and it isn't. I'm afraid it's all crooked in his mind."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Just let it stay crooked, I guess. Crooked things that ought to be straight must get that way by themselves, I think. If they have to be hammered out they're only make-believe." She was silent for a minute, then added so suddenly that Graydon was sure she hoped to catch him off his guard.

"What would you do about it if you were in my place?"

He smiled. "That is one of the very things I mustn't advise you about. But I shall want to know, very

sincerely, when it begins to straighten out—and see what happens then. I shall be interested in John."

"Well, that's more than I am, right now," the girl retorted. She was restless under the keen scrutiny with which Graydon was suddenly observing her. She was still uncomfortable when she said good-by to him. She had intended to ask him what part in her affairs he thought Brandon was to play. But she concluded that she would have to find that out for herself, too. It was then that she resolved that perhaps Brandon could show her the way to go, as well—or better, perhaps, than John.

CHAPTER IX

THE CURTAIN BEGINS TO RISE

BRANDON watched the girl who sat opposite him, across the little table. The wraith-like smile, the smile that irritated while it taunted, hovered slyly at his lips, and in his eyes. The girl he watched breathed quickly, alertly, while she surveyed the bright scene around them. Her eyes leapt into far corners of the pink and gold hung room, in among the dancers and the other tables like their own. Suddenly her glance met his. She nodded at him, as if she had surprised his reflections, whatever they were.

"It was good of you to come," he murmured. "Presently it will not be such a simple matter to win a *tête-à-tête* from you."

"After awhile, I hope, you will tell me what you know and I don't know, of what 'presently' is to be for me," Joanna returned, the serious cloud which was never far absent showing again in her face.

"We shall have to make a new bargain," he said. "That you will accept from me completely that I am only a spectator to your extraordinary circumstances. I shall be a part of them, only as you give me favor. What are you——?"

"Please!" Joanna interrupted. "Not now—not just yet. Of course a man always has a list of questions

to put to any girl he is just getting acquainted with, at least that's what I've found, and your list is longer than most I suppose. I've always had the answers—learned them by heart, you know, but they won't fit now. So I shall have to think when you start in. And I don't want to think—just yet. About myself, I mean."

She fell to looking about the room again, eyes wandering restlessly, but shining with the inner satisfactions of youth with its setting of the moment.

Brandon had come for her, as they had agreed, in the wake of the flowers she had found in their tissued box awaiting her when she returned with Georgie from their gay round of shopping after her visit to Graydon's office. One of the blossoms now clung to her waist. Brandon, as he eyed her, compared its delicate perfections with the more buoyant loveliness of its mistress—a loveliness still marred by the too elaborately penciled eyebrows, the beaded lashes copied from a screen close-up, and lips that betrayed a new attempt at reserve but still were much too Cupid-like. They were accentuations that few would notice in the conglomerate company around them, but Brandon's was an experienced taste.

For their evening he had chosen the brightest of the fashionable rendezvous where names and distinction of some sort or other are held to be the only acceptable sesames. The women were beautiful and of the varied pattern that decorates the new age. Débutantes and matrons from the first families, nasal-voiced and red-throated women of the *nouveau riche* from last fami-

lies, and the ever inescapable bevy of screen and stage celebrities from none. Joanna had tasted of the gaudy cabarets—they had been the lamp-posts along her paths of gaiety. But here—here were women gowned by master dressmakers of the day, artists of the world of the elect. And the men matched the women. She caught her breath at the originality of this thought—the men matched the women whose jeweled throats and arms shone velvet-white against their black shoulders.

And the music—soft exotic strains that laughed and sobbed their rhythmic ecstasies. Jazz, of course, but not the kind she had ever heard. A super-jazz that called to her with its melodies of lulling romance. Her feet were still and her slender, warm-pulsed little body was quiet, but her soul was dancing; the gleams in her deep brown eyes were dancing, and through her brain new sensations danced. Brandon was wholly sensible of the little dramas that flitted across the eager face he eyed so curiously.

"I would like to dance," Joanna exclaimed, suddenly. "Shall we?"

He rose instantly and swept her into the maze on the floor. Joanna observed that women, when they had looked into Brandon's face and recognized him, shifted their eyes quickly into hers. What she saw in their glances puzzled her; she recognized something speculative, as if these women who knew the man whose arm encircled her and who danced as none of Joanna's partners danced, had in common a curious regard for her. She concluded, shrewdly, that women would profess to

not like Brandon, but were secretly fascinated by him. She felt uneasy, again, and was glad when the encore finished.

"Now the questions," she challenged him abruptly, when he had held a light to her cigarette and then to his own.

"But I haven't made a program of them," he protested—once more his voice was like a caress. "I promise to combine them all into one, or two, at most; and be content with whatever you conclude to tell me. What are you going to do?—that, of course, is the first one."

"And that's longer than any list any man ever put to me," she assured him. "Yesterday morning I went to my job at the store wondering if I could get along for two weeks without any salary. Tonight I'm wondering where to begin to spend money. You see one of my plans—the first one I made got all smashed up somehow, I don't know how—but it's gone, anyway."

Brandon probed deep. "That was a most interesting chap who waited for you last night—in the drawing-room," he ventured. "I wonder if the smash you have in mind came after I left you?"

Joanna looked out into the room, as if, in the brilliance of the scene to soothe her memory of the hours in the "drawing-room only" after Brandon had gone.

"Yes," she admitted, quietly. "After you left. You see John was all that I had, the only one to share with. He dug a knife into me and twisted it around."

"That shouldn't be serious," Brandon observed.

"Wounds of that sort are easily healed. He'll soon be thinking better of his temper—and his suspicions."

"I am not so sure of that!" she returned quickly.

"He doesn't understand me—it seems as if nobody does. But he was the only one who hurt. It would be easy to straighten out his mind, of course. But he couldn't preach at me, any more. That would make him uncomfortable."

"Was it, then, so serious? Is he so very necessary?"

Joanna shot a quick glance at him. She decided not to answer that, now. "You said there was to be a second question—what is that one?"

"You have already answered it," he murmured. "It had to do with—John. I won't ask any more about him. I am to be his rival, you know."

Brandon's habit of saying this sort of thing so easily, worried Joanna. Any of her boys fumbled dreadfully when they attempted deft gallantries.

"I believe you could look into any woman's eyes and say 'I love you' with a free conscience and without a quiver," she challenged him.

He laughed softly. "You will find few men, in your new career, who will hesitate with such a vow," he replied. "And, I fancy, you will not be long learning how to meet all such emergencies."

"I shan't fear the men," she agreed. "It's the women. I wonder how I can bring myself to measure up. You see I realize that I shall have to learn a lot of new—well, learn a lot."

"I'd give most anything if you would finish your phrase—a lot of what?"

"Tricks," she confessed, laughing at him. "I could hold my own with Georgie—she's been rather a chum, you know—or with any of the rest. If they had anybody I wanted I usually landed him if I tried, and they had to start early to get anyone away from me—but now, well, I'm in for new competition now."

A woman, a young woman, whose smooth black hair clung to a beautifully formed head; a woman with somber black eyes that suggested twin flowers of night, hovered close to the table and paused. An observer would have thought that she had stopped, and was about to speak to one or the other of the pair at the table. But she moved on, her slender hand fluttering at her escort's sleeve. Only one who observed very closely would have detected the almost imperceptible signal that Brandon passed to her with a gesture of his cigarette. Joanna was not even conscious of the little tableau of an instant. Brandon kept her attention.

"You think, then, that your problems will have to do mostly with—what you are calling competition from your own sex? That implies that your plans, when they're formed, will be a conquest of men?"

Joanna's brow wrinkled. "That sounds as if I'd admitted something I shouldn't. Won't you tell me what?"

"But you haven't," he protested, earnestly. "What else should there be for you to plan—but to bring the moths to your candle-flame? Could there be anything more interesting for a girl so lovely, and so free from care?"

Joanna smiled into his eyes, brightly. "There really

isn't anything else to do, is there? For a while I shall be just buying things. No one will tell me of any thing else to do with the money. And there are so many things to buy, I hardly know where to start in. I shall have to find someone, too, to help me. Georgie has been my best girl friend, but she's too much like I am. All she can do is to squeal. That's a trick she developed until it's become second nature to her. I imagine men like you, for example, require more efforts on the part of a girl than we could think of behind the silk counter."

Brandon smiled with her. "You mustn't class me as so different from the rest of 'your boys' as you call them. You have succeeded admirably in captivating me, without added wiles. And you can't put me down as a plain fortune hunter, can you? You see I have a famous banker as a doting uncle and I've heaps of stocks and bonds and such things—so you are not to consider me as having set a trap for your millions."

"There—that's what I mean," Joanna flung at him. "I shall have to learn how to meet you and your kind when you say things like that. The best sort of talk I've ever had for a man who went right down into deep water was, 'come in out of the wet,' or something like that. John has been the only one I could ever allow to talk seriously to me about—well, about my ever being married, you know."

Brandon caught the wistfulness in her voice, the wistfulness that came into it at every mention of John. His lips curled again, ever so slightly. "You will have to listen to a great many men who will talk of mar-

riage," he said. "I think it is better for you that you had your little smash, last night before you had plunged too far. John will be waiting, when you are ready to call him—if you really want him."

A deep flush warmed Joanna's face. Her eyes hardened. Brandon saw, but he had been deliberate. He met her eyes coolly. Before she could make her attack he disarmed her.

"I fancy that whoever bestowed a fortune upon you would prefer that you be uninfluenced in your spending of it—for a time, at any rate. That, though, is only my own conclusion. And I'm wondering if you will fit John into your new career as snugly as you fitted him into the one behind you."

Again Joanna surveyed the company around her while she considered what sort of reply to make. She realized that Brandon had been leading up to this and she was unhappy before a doubt that he had succeeded in planting in her mind.

Would John fit in? Now? Into this gay world of pleasure, joy, unrepression, to which she was being admitted? Could she, with him holding up for her the examples of his own old-fashioned ideals, exact from her new opportunities their full meed of the only things she knew to be worth while? She hated Brandon, fiercely, she concluded, for conjuring up the doubt. And hated him for the cunning with which he had stirred it.

She was brought abruptly out of her reflections. The woman who had once before hovered at the table had come up again. Joanna had not seen that quiet

signal from Brandon's cigarette which was instantly caught at the nearby table where a woman sat with her escort, a man made much after the pattern of Brandon himself.

Brandon rose and greeted the newcomer. Joanna looked up at her, startled by a sleek, perfectly assembled beauty that was as pungent as the essence of some heavy perfume. Brandon made his presentations easily. Joanna caught the softness of a foreign sounding name, and heard that Brandon called the stranger, Yvonne. Despite the pretenses, Joanna sensed, instinctively, that the meeting had been arranged.

CHAPTER X

"RODDY" KENILWORTH

IN the sudden cascade of small talk with which the newcomers were settled into their places at the table by two waiters, each more excitable than the other, Joanna was vaguely uncomfortable—out of her accustomed depths. Her store of smart things seemed utterly inadequate to the easy greetings and persiflage. Within her own experiences introductory conversations took one or the other of two set courses —herself, or himself. She was never concerned with other women, whether they liked her or not. Not the ones who came and went across her horizon. They were all like her, merely rivals, equipped, as she was, with the common weapons of our modest flapperhood—lips shaped for kisses, ready wisdom that guarded those lips when occasion arose, clothes that added to the lure of her and a skill at defense or attack.

In Joanna's scheme of things any girl, these days, must be ready instantly to take the defense or launch an attack—one or the other was certain to be necessary. She and Georgie got along splendidly in the induction of all new acquaintanceships among the available supply of properly mannered, good-enough-looking young chaps with new places to go. She considered

now, when she stole a glance at the man who had come up with the woman with the sleek, black hair, that by the time he had said, "How do you do?" to Georgie, that little lady would have blithely inquired of him:

"Well, now, look who's here! Why do you think you amount to so much?"

And she reflected that, this time, Georgie would get the worst of it in any such encounter.

As she concluded a moment before, at her first sight of him, Kenilworth—"Roddy," Brandon had called him—was made in the same mold as Brandon, but with a difference. She disliked Brandon, because she feared that he was to have some tragic influence over her and her mysterious future, but, she admitted, he wouldn't be little. He would not be the sort who would plot for some small favor. If he should want to amuse himself with a woman, he would aim at her soul. She knew the kind—and the danger they embodied.

Kenilworth—he was of the sort she was most accustomed to, only, of course, he was the super-kind that would press to his lips whatever ribbons might come to his finger tips at night, and give them to the winds in the morning without regard for whether they were of silk or cotton.

She was brought sharply out of her reflections by the young woman with the black hair. Brandon called her Yvonne.

"Don't you all know it's horrid to have to pretend," Yvonne said, suddenly, allowing her fingers to flutter over Joanna's wrist, "that we aren't bubbling over with

excitement about Miss Manners' amazing news? I, for one, must tell how thrilling I think it must be."

Joanna gave her a grateful glance. "There doesn't seem to be anything else I can think about," she admitted. "If I only knew 'why and from whom.' "

"Let's see," Kenilworth mused aloud, "Joanna stands for some generosity of the gods, doesn't it? Something like a 'gracious gift,' if I remember my mythology aright. Gods, like gift horses, mustn't be looked in the mouth. Not even by the loveliest of their favorites. My advice to Miss Manners is to never worry over the source of her dramatic good fortune but proceed to hire as many pipers to make music for her as she wants to pay."

Yvonne laughed a silvery little laugh that Joanna envied. "And you, Roddy, are dying to offer yourself as one of the original pipers," she accused. To Joanna she added brightly:

"He's a beast of prey, this Roddy. He has the same accessories in every port that a sailor is supposed to have put away for his shore leaves. You must never take him seriously. Especially when he makes furious love to you." Kenilworth raised a protesting hand, but Yvonne continued, nodding at him:

"Oh, you'll be making love to her before the evening's out." She turned again to Joanna, and informed her, with a trick of dropping her voice, into the inflections of a mock confidence that Joanna resolved to practice as soon as she was home: "He'll start in with your eyes, my dear; he has a fancy that young women

pin their faith in their eyes and old women on their complexions."

"Don't let her mislead you," Kenilworth pleaded. "She has me confused with someone else. She is positively libelous. I never begin with the eyes, as I'll prove to you as soon as possible!"

"You see!" Yvonne exclaimed. "He prepared you for his onslaughts. You must tell me at once if I am right. It'll be the eyes, I'm sure. They're quite pretty, you know. I can fancy him raving over them."

Brandon came to Joanna's rescue. "She will survive, even Roddy, I'm sure," he commented. "She has a most disconcerting way of putting the proper people in the right places."

Joanna smiled brightly at Kenilworth. "I don't know whether you mean it or not," he said, "but you are saying to me that with so much dancing to be done before they turn us out you'd like to be getting busy. May I consider that I'm right?"

When they were on the floor Joanna asked him to repeat Yvonne's name. "I didn't hear, or I didn't understand it," she explained.

"Yvonne will do, quite satisfactorily," Kenilworth assured her. "Whoever knows her knows her well enough to forget the rest of it—if he can! Anyhow, it's Coutant—the Yvonne Coutant you read about. There's a husband here tonight, in a corner some place. I don't know which one it is, the first or the last. No use asking her. She's probably forgotten."

Yvonne Coutant! Now Joanna knew why her face had fascinated her; why it had seemed so vaguely

familiar! Each marriage a sensation, and each divorce a greater one. She had seen her pictured regularly in the Sunday newspapers—that part of them which she really looked at, the illustrated pages. She remembered Yvonne Coutant divorcing a college boy she'd run away with—a college boy who was a scion of a family, or something like that. Yvonne Coutant engaged to another millionaire's son and then to an Egyptian prince. Yvonne Coutant at Monte Carlo, shocking English duchesses with gowns that wouldn't be allowed even in the movies—one newspaper had described them just that way. And in the most daring of beach costumes at Deauville. Then married to a famous author and promptly divorced in Paris. Joanna knew her Sunday-papered history as girls of another day knew their cookbooks. The Paris buyer for the store had sent over a dress, one time, which he said was an exact copy of the model worn by Yvonne Coutant at Longchamps. The store designers had added four inches to the back and front and put on shoulder straps, and made of it a best-selling number in the four-hundred-dollar class. And she, Joanna, yesterday morning "Miss 27," had talked with her! Had talked and held her own with her!

"Did you really mean that her husband actually is here, tonight?" she asked her companion.

"One of them. If I spot him I'll give you a nudge. He's with a new flame. Yvonne went over to them awhile ago to see what she's like. Says she's the kind that has golden weddings."

Joanna laughed gayly with him. "Funny things to

look forward to, golden weddings, aren't they?" he bantered, looking down at her quizzically.

"Fancy you, now, getting through the marrying stages fast enough to leave time for an anniversary like that!"

"Oh, I shan't be so quick to get married that I'll be likely to change my mind," Joanna retorted.

"Now that's a sensible resolve," Kenilworth agreed. She felt his arm tightening a bit. He was holding her closer than Brandon had, almost as close as her own dancing boys customarily did. She began to wonder much about him. She thought him old, much too old, but he danced with her and talked to her on the level of easy youth. She had observed earlier in the evening that most of the men around the tables appeared to be much older than their women.

"An exquisite flower like you," her companion was saying, "you and your happy kind—is much more attractive when you're not set on being exclusively worn in one coat lapel. I shouldn't say half the things I really mean if I thought you'd be adding them up into a matrimonial sum. You'll find life is all too short for that sort of thing."

Joanna looked at him queerly. "I ought to say something to that," she announced, "but I'm not sure just what. It'll probably come to me in the middle of the night and then I'll know I'm a dumbbell."

"I shall supply your comments now, and spare your slumbers," he returned. "I don't like that dumbbell! You should say: 'Sit at my feet, sir, and speak freely

of pleasant things. They shall enter one ear and depart not from the other.' "

"I thought we had decided to talk about Yvonne, and the husband," she returned. "Why did she divorce him, if she had to marry him at all? I've always wondered about such things."

"Our beautiful friend is one who is never comfortable without a thrill," Kenilworth informed her. "A new husband is a thrill, I suppose. As for other reasons for Yvonne's whims, you will probably find them out for yourself. She has taken a liking to you. I know the signs. She'll probably decide to take you under her wing. You will make an admirable foil for her."

A curious turmoil shot through Joanna's blood. Yvonne Coutant might take her, Joanna, under her wing! The most glittering wings in the world according to her standards! She glanced shyly at the man who was dancing with her. He caught her glance and fathomed it.

"Quite probable, I assure you," he insisted. "And the obligation won't be on your side, you know. You mustn't forget that. And it won't be the money. She's collected half of at least two millionaire fortunes already. It'll be Brandon."

"Mr. Brandon? I don't see what you mean."

"Now you've got me gossiping! Oh, well, we're all new friends. You'll play us one against the other, most likely. I'll start your imagination working. If there is one thing in the world our charming Yvonne desires, that she hasn't found a way to get, it's Bran-

don, your banker's nephew. And Brandon undoubtedly will be having a try at you. Because any other woman would handle the situation differently. I've a mind Yvonne will want to take her newest rival into her own camp."

"Why are you telling me this?" she flung up at him.

He didn't answer at once, but smiled, quizzically again, and let his eyes roam over her upturned face. The music stopped and he guided her to the rim of the dance floor toward an opening between the tables. Still he had not acknowledged her sudden question. She put her hand on his sleeve and stopped him.

"You haven't told me, you know," she reminded him, standing quite still so that he could not evade her again: "Why do you warn me against your—both of your friends?"

"For perfectly obvious reasons, my dear girl," Kenilworth said, then, meeting her gaze steadily: "I've suddenly decided to have a try at you myself. Brandon plays his games deep, and I think Yvonne plays hers deeper still. And just now you are the stake. I'm going to play for you, too."

CHAPTER XI

THE PLAY BEGINS

THE flush that deepened the hues of Joanna's cheeks, and the wrinkles in her brow, did not escape Yvonne when Kenilworth and the girl returned to the table. Brandon, too, saw, and divided a quick glance between the girl and the man who had been dancing with her. Yvonne, in her fluttering way, touched the girl's hand.

"He's been making love to you! I knew it. Was I right? Didn't he begin with your eyes?"

Joanna's frown vanished. In the sheer joy of her closeness to the woman whose exotic beauty and fascinating adventures in a world of romance had made her a celebrity, her trouble over the mystery which confronted her in each new association was quickly charmed away.

"Am I supposed to tell?" she parried, appealing to Kenilworth. She was nonchalantly lighting a gold-tipped cigarette. He answered easily:

"Some day, my dear, you will wear your loves like bangles on your wrists, for your friends to estimate and your rivals to envy. You may as well begin now, I made my confession. I promised to overwhelm you with my adorations. But you must assure the company that I did not begin by paying you compliments."

"I have heard," Brandon remarked, "that Roddy never compliments a woman. A dozen of his victims have assured me that he declares his love first and then tells them why. His reasons are, therefore, accepted as being truthful statements of fact, and not flatteries. A woman doesn't class what is said of her, by a man who is in love with her, as flattery. She believes it to be a just inventory of her perfections."

"Clever, that!" Yvonne declared. "It proves what I've always contended—that a man ought to have a style of his own. It's positively tiresome to listen to most men go sentimental."

"What weary hours you must spend!" Kenilworth exclaimed. "I promise you complete relaxation if you will take a turn on the floor with me. Miss Manners, here, is dying to ask Brandon what sort of a chap I am, and to ask him who you're planning to marry next."

"A cocktail, first," she demanded. A waiter, to whom Kenilworth had entrusted a pair of silver flasks, responded to his signal. Joanna had refused a previous offering and had not been pressed. This time Brandon quietly reached across the table and turned up her glass.

When Yvonne, with a nod to her, had moved away for her dance with Kenilworth, Joanna turned to Brandon eagerly.

"He seemed to read just what I was thinking," she said. "Tell me about him—and Yvonne, too. I never dreamed that some day I would know her. You see

she has been one of those interesting people we talk about just to prove that we keep up with the news."

"Shall we begin with Roddy?" Brandon asked, and they did. Joanna sought him out on the floor as Brandon explained him—drawing for her a curious picture of a wastrel—but a picture she classified as of a romantic idler in a colorful domain.

A bachelor lodge at Palm Beach where he was host to that company of women whose husbands labor at home for the money with which their wives blossom gorgeously and recklessly—beneath the Florida palms, and make their plays at Bailey's, America's great gambling rooms; a wooer of débutantes whose names shone golden in the purlieus of Society, and an amused dabbler among the studio moths of New York's psychopathic Greenwich Village; a sportsman in England, where he hunted, occasionally, with the hounds of a country lord, and a beau-gallant patron of all the beauty and the bizarre that is France.

"A woman need never fear being seen with our Roddy in attendance upon her," Brandon added to his general description. "His affairs are so many no one keeps track of them or becomes interested in a new one. He adds just the proper perspective to any young woman's background, for to be admired by Roddy is a cachet of extreme romantic worthiness."

"But his business—doesn't he really do anything?" Joanna wanted to know.

"He's of a family, you know. Inherited money. I believe he would explain that it is the duty of heirs who can to help those of this generation who can't

pay the price of pleasures. That keeps him moderately busy. He is particularly fond of youth—young youth such as yours, or seasoned youth, such as Yvonne's. If you are of the mind to be amused, you will find Roddy most amiable."

Joanna thought Brandon was challenging her, but he gave no sign of it. She pondered, a minute, the miracle of that cryptic declaration of Kenilworth's at the edge of the dance floor, "I shall play for you, too!" spoken to her, to Joanna, by one who was unimpressed even by such exquisite women as—Yvonne, for example. A tempest of exhilaration surged within her. In a flash the realization that had so far eluded her, of what had been spread before her by her mysterious money, echoed across her brain. Her heart, which had never lost its uneasiness since her first summons to Graydon's office, became suddenly buoyant. Something in which she was the stake—and that was what Kenilworth had called it—was going on about her, but whatever its portents, it already had brought to her two men with quiet, suave promise that they would lay siege to her, that they would sue for the favors of her. And these were men—not the dancing boys, "as light in their heads as they try to be on their feet," as she had described them to Graydon, but men of the world, of the world where jewels were real, where gaiety was genuine, where romance need not be marred by the sordidness of constant make-believe.

"And Yvonne?" she suddenly asked Brandon. "I wonder if ever I shall be like her?"

Brandon's question came quickly. Afterwards Joanna remembered this, and that it reminded her of Eggleston's quickness to ask her "What else?" when she promised to buy something besides dancing pumps.

"Do you want to be like Yvonne?"

"I think there is no girl I know who would not give her soul—almost—to be like her," Joanna replied, so softly and suddenly wistful that Brandon knew she was indeed echoing a deep yearning. "You see," she went on, "she is the model we all try to copy. So I suppose she must have all the good things of life that we try to get little tastes of. She knows how, too, to enjoy them."

"You think Yvonne knows how—how to be what you have wanted to be?"

"That is it. I hadn't reasoned it out, before, but I know that's it. She must know how, or she wouldn't be making the best of life."

The ghost of a smile that gave cynical expression to Brandon's face came to the curve of his lips. For a moment he watched the girl, watched her eyes leaping about the room, watched them when they rested on Yvonne when she traced her among the dancers, and when they hovered about Kenilworth. Then he murmured:

"A good many people in the world would have a different analysis of Yvonne Coutant's recipe for what you term making the best of her life. Some would pass a different judgment than 'she knows how'."

Joanna regarded him with her defenses quivering at her finger tips. "Of course they would—some

would!" she indignantly agreed. "People are always finding fault if you are not just like they are, or like they think you ought to be. What is one's life for, if not to be enjoyed? And having a good time isn't necessarily being wrong about it, you know. Is it?"

He met her plea for understanding promptly. "I can imagine no better bargain than an unfettered conscience allied with an unhampered pursuit of one's own desires, and old-fashioned critics be hanged!"

"Well," Joanna considered, "that sounds as if you mean that I have the right idea about things, so I suppose it's all right. Anyhow I don't see why people can't say their prayers with a smile as well as they can with a grouch."

"To that sentiment," Brandon proposed, "I suggest another cocktail." He produced Kenilworth's silver flask from under a serviette and filled her glass. She smiled across at him while she sipped, and felt that she had put up another good battle.

When Kenilworth and Yvonne again were at the table Kenilworth begged Joanna to tell him "if Brandon wrapped me in scandal and delivered me as a broken idol" while they were dancing.

"He told me you were not at all dangerous, or, at least, he gave me that impression. I shan't be at all afraid of you."

Joanna's pulses raced when Yvonne proposed to her that she come to her own place and make it her home; "For a time, anyway. You will want to be getting away from your old atmosphere, you know,

and I shall love to have you with me—for as long as you wish."

What Kenilworth had said flashed across her mind; his prediction of just this invitation. She fancied that she caught a flicker of his eyelids when she glanced at him. For one brief instant the vision of John framed itself among her thoughts, but it faded quickly when she had shaken her head a little, to drive it away. Any thought of John had become unpleasant. It aroused defiance inside of her, rebelliousness. Always, when he appeared in her mind, she saw herself, at first, going up to him, her face lifted, her lips held pleadingly for the greeting that had been so customary between them. This sort of vision hurt, though. The phrase that ran so often across her brain would come back; "Would that fit in, now?" This time it was the thought of John coming to her and finding her with Yvonne. There was something about that which wasn't right. So she gave that little shake of the head and drove John away.

"I'm afraid I should be awfully funny to you," she said to Yvonne, her excitement at the prospect playing in her voice. "I can't be still, for long, because there is so much I want to do but can't think of, that I just run around in circles."

"But I'll help you, perhaps," Yvonne assured her. "I shall have as enjoyable a time about helping you launch yourself, as you will. There will be a motor car to buy—and I've never got over my fondness for picking out motor cars; and jewels, and clothes—it will be a lark, truly."

Joanna would have yielded to Yvonne's suggestion that tonight would be as good as any other time, but while they waited in the foyer of the restaurant-club for Brandon's car and Yvonne's, Brandon murmured to her:

"Decisions made after midnight are not always safest. Yvonne will welcome you tomorrow, as warmly as tonight. And tomorrow will do you just as well. I am going to drive you home."

"You mean," Joanna said, lightly, "to the rooming-house. Whatever I do, or wherever I go, you must remember that I haven't any—!" She waited a while, and bit at her lips. Then she finished: "That I haven't had any home, for a long time."

CHAPTER XII

A BOND IS TIGHTENED

SO Joanna, a billow of snow-white ermine, nestled in the cushions of Brandon's limousine, went happily to the place she had called home; went to the rooming house where Mrs. Adams lost her sleep over flapper lodgers. She thought it would be for the last time.

Realization that she was rich, fabulously rich like Yvonne Coutant, like a movie star, like Mrs. Delancy Jordan, with whose son Bob Joanna once had a "date" negotiated over his mother's shoulder at the silk counter, had settled at last in her groping brain. Her fight for understanding of the fantastic thing that had happened to her was over, soothed away by the retrospects of the evening. The feel of the ermines against her cheeks and throat and shoulders, the nearness of Brandon who wore his evening clothes so smartly, the prospects of the morrow when she would move into the aura of Yvonne, symbol of Life, throbbed her pulses and suffused her alert body with a gentle glow.

For the twentieth time she resolved to puzzle no more about the source of the money, or the reason of it. Something would happen to her, of course. She'd meet it on tiptoes. One thing, though, she must square

up. Brandon, whatever his part in her affairs, mustn't think she was—well, the kind of a bell that is all clapper and no ring. She taxed him suddenly:

"Why didn't you want me to go to Miss Coutant's tonight? It would have been much easier than tomorrow."

"A wholly selfish precaution," Brandon informed her. "You're an important person to someone, you know, for some reason. Decisions you make now are of consequence. I'd rather not have the responsibility of delivering you into anybody's guidance. Then you will not be able to tell me about it later on, if you feel like it."

"Do you think I shall ever be sorry?"

"That doesn't follow. Certainly, though, Yvonne Coutant represents a distinct theory of what life owes its dependents. You wouldn't adopt her as a counselor in the same impulse that would lead you to go in for—let us say, uplift."

"Yet you want me to go to her, to learn from her what to do with my money, to spend it her way and to become like her? You knew she was going to ask me. You arranged it."

She saw that she had struck home. For a brief moment Brandon was perturbed. Then he smiled at her. "When you begin to accuse me I know I'm getting on," he murmured.

"Oh, I shall let you get on fast enough, until I know what's what. Then——!"

"And then what?"

"There's no use going to a funeral until somebody's dead, is there? We won't be downhearted now."

When he stood with her, for parting minutes, in the rooming house reception hall, where a dim light burned its grim reproach to young ladies who breezed in from midnight to four, Brandon suddenly took Joanna's hands in his, and gently drew her to him until she stood quite close, so that she had to lift her chin to look in his face. For a moment she was panic-stricken. It was the prelude of a kiss, she thought. She didn't want Brandon to kiss her. Her lips burned at the threat of it. She would not protest, if he asked her, or if he took his caress without asking. But it would spoil the evening. Still when chaps were decent, and had contributed what might be called a good time for lack of a better phrase, there was but one coin with which to reward them—the coin that passed frankly as currency. But she didn't want Brandon to take it, and he didn't.

He held her hands and looked down into her eyes, silently. She met his gaze steadily, unafraid, but quivering a little. She had reasoned to herself that tonight she had discovered a clew to her fear and dislike of this cynical, good looking, perfectly poised man who impressed her always as if he was taking charge of her. It would be woman, she thought. The woman in her leaped to the defensive before him, and with a sense of futility. Kenilworth she could battle on his own ground. Brandon tortured women, she had concluded. She wasn't ready yet to meet him fairly.

But he spoke softly. "Do you know," he said, "I

shouldn't be surprised if you'd win through, after all."

She caught her breath. "Win through? Why—what?"

He dropped her hands, instantly, and his manner changed. "You must forget that," he said, mocking again. "It's another case of a funeral with nobody dead yet. At least, don't remember it for a long time."

Georgie, her own new hats and wraps and gowns, Joanna's shower of gifts, hung from the door top, the chandelier and either side of the mirror, so that she might prop back on the bed pillows and examine them, was awake, and waiting. She had refused all invitations for the evening, both sentimental and hilarious, frankly admitting she couldn't leave her wardrobe at home alone. Joanna threw off her momentary depression, the aftermath of Brandon's sententiousness, and plunged into a gay recital of the night's events. Then Georgie broached her own news.

"John was here tonight," she announced. "He was at the bank today. Mr. Eggleston sent for him. Mr. Graydon, at the store, had told Mr. Eggleston what you had said—that John had suspected the place the money came from. The bank wanted to put him right. John's got it all through his half-baked mind and he's like a bird dog that's been pointing the wrong way."

Joanna sank onto the bed, the wistfulness haunting her eyes again. Her plans for the morrow began to crumble, and in their place rose something else, vague and unshapen, but before it she stood side by side

with John. Then, with a petulant shake of her shoulders she reassembled her plans, and the arrogance came back into the tilt of her chin.

"But he hurt, Georgie—I don't think——"

"Oh, you can arrange things to suit yourself," Georgie assured her, wisely. "He's got six cylinders under the hood, maybe, but only one works. I've always told you he was full of carbon. He's frightfully cut up."

"That's not it. I knew he would be, some day—it wasn't me he suspected so much as it was anybody, any girl I mean, who's got knees and isn't too ashamed to show them. I'm going to——"

"What?" Georgie prompted her, but Joanna bit her lips and wouldn't finish her sentence.

She had intended to spend the rest of the night packing her new things and her old, for she had no idea of sleep. She had wanted just to talk to Georgie and shape vague things that she planned to do for her into a definite program. This last idea Georgie dismissed at once with a practical, "Wait until you know where you're at. I'll take my fun reporting about you to old 'Good Morning.' I always did want to land that bird. Now that you're gone maybe I'll get a chance."

Joanna cross-examined Georgie patiently about John, but with little success. Georgie was detached, her roving eyes engaging her attention with ever new splendors creeping out in the sheen or the trim or the drape of one of the new things hanging about the room. "He said he wanted to see you and square the

deal, and that he'd hunt you up tomorrow," was all she would vouchsafe.

With the morning Joanna had decided. She sent to John a brief little note that cost her an hour. She wanted him—as always and as usual. Everything was all right. They wouldn't talk about that night when he accused her. But he must come to her—at Yvonne's. This dispatched to John's workroom in the offices of the firm where he was working up to his career, she went to the bank.

Eggleston rose to receive her. Again she saw a great gentleness beneath the grave, austere exterior of this man whose harshness was a tradition that even shop girls knew. In his presence she trembled at her own audacity in coming to speak to him of her little matters.

"But you may always come to me—at any time," the banker assured her, patiently.

"I have made up my mind what to do," she told him, when she had sought some other opening and failed to find it. "It isn't very much, just that I have found a great friend who will show me how—I mean, who will help me."

"You have the most disconcerting way of not finishing what you start to say," Eggleston protested. Joanna realized that she could practice no evasions with the great man.

"I think I meant to say, someone who will show me how to enjoy my money," she said uneasily. "You see you, nor Mr. Graydon, nor Mr. Brandon will give me any advice. I don't know what to do. I feel

there is so much I could do, and should do. I tried to win a prize, one time, by thinking up what I'd do if I had a thousand dollars. I knew all sorts of things. I think I built hospitals and started schools for girls to learn how to be Mary Pickfords and even then I didn't win the prize. Now that I've all that you say is in the bank for me I can't think of a thing. I guess I want a little fun. So I'm going to learn from one who knows how."

"Just a little fun, as you call it! But you can buy a lot of pleasure with the money you have. Won't it pall on you after awhile?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. I'm a little afraid I don't know much of anything, you see. It's a lot of responsibility somebody has put onto my shoulders, isn't it?"

For a time he didn't answer. When he did he asked her abruptly: "Who is your friend and guide going to be?"

"I don't suppose you know her. Miss Coutant, Yvonne Coutant. She's very famous, you know, and has heaps of money of her own. Men are always in love with her. She's thrilling."

Again he was silent, and then Joanna thought there was something cold in his voice. "Yes, I know of her. I fancy almost everyone does. Let's see—is she divorced now, or married?"

"Divorced. But that doesn't make any difference, does it?"

"Not the slightest." He spoke briefly. She was sure, now, that he had gone cold. She decided not to

dwell, after all, upon her plans. She spoke of John.

"Your friend and mine, Mr. Graydon, was deeply concerned by your report of the young man's misunderstanding. He gave me to believe, also, that you were disturbed by that circumstance. As your banker I took it upon myself to protect your interests—even if those interests were, at the moment, a mere young man. If I offended, I am sorry. You are a valuable patron of the bank. I would not offend you."

"But I wanted to tell you how happy it made me!" Joanna exclaimed. The sudden change in him distressed her. He had gone far away from her, and she had always sensed him as very close, very close to her in some unfathomable way. "I would not take the money—none of it, if it should cost me the thing I want John to think of me."

She was gazing at him too earnestly not to see. His hardness vanished from his face and his eyes as gently as the passing of a shadow. When he spoke again, it was as if she were not there; as if he spoke to a memory:

"Yes, there are times, when money doesn't count. So long as youth knows this, everything's all right."

Joanna nodded to him, quietly, silently. At that moment she understood that something had gone from one to the other of them. But she couldn't for the life of her, explain what. In a moment she was telling him about John; of their school days, and of their coming together again in the city when she was "on her own," and he, with neither fortune nor chance, began

to build for his career, of her hope in him, and of their plans—plans that had all gone awry.

"But have they?" Eggleston interrupted. "Doesn't he figure, some way, in your prospects?"

Joanna considered. "Yes," she admitted; "but I don't know how—yet. I don't think I'd make him happy, just yet. There's a lot for him to learn, as there is for me." Then she added, brightly: "But I'll figure it all out some way. And now, may I have some more of my money? I'm going to begin to spend, you know."

CHAPTER XIII

YVONNE COUTANT

YVONNE COUTANT was one of those women, young in body and lure but old in the lore of all else that is woman, of whom it was the fashion to know much, but of whom few did. Her appearance on the sunshaded balcony at Shepherds, in Cairo, brought heads together and curious gleams into eyes that had grown weary with their struggle to pierce the blue haze that shrouds the distant Sphinx. Her arrival at Nice, or Cannes, during the season of the mi-carême fêtes was told in the Casino at Monte Carlo and echoed from villa to villa along the Riviera. If, some evening, she framed herself in the purple curtains of the exclusive Embassy Club in London, or stopped to drop her cloak in the lounge of any other fashionable supper rendezvous, Mayfair knew of it long before it greeted the dawn with a final brandy and soda. Only the favored few knew whence she came, or what were to be the high lights of her stay.

For Yvonne Coutant was a creature of high lights—"Roddy" Kenilworth called them "high spots." Teddy Dorminster, of London, Paris and New York, who was born a lord but with none of the sobrieties supposedly attached to such high estate, maintained a continuous argument with Roddy as to whether or not it

shouldn't be "spot" lights. Being an Englishman, Lord Teddy was a stickler for exactitudes. In its minor way this was as good an example as any of the controversies Yvonne Coutant fostered, and quite as sensible. She guarded her mysteries, her past and her future, and danced to melodies of her own making.

Undoubtedly born in France, she had married an American and an Englishman. She laughed at both when they announced that their affections for her were serious, and laughed at them both when she decided that as husbands they were too encumbering.

Roddy Kenilworth might have said a great deal more about Yvonne Coutant than the sum of these things, if he wished. So might Brandon. Of the two Roddy probably had the safer knowledge. He was an unprejudiced observer of women. Brandon was only occasionally interested, Kenilworth always. And somewhere out of his knowledge of her Kenilworth had acquired the power of disconcerting her whenever he wished. She sensed the challenge in his mood when he came upon her in a corner of the little winter garden which opened off the drawing room of her house in one of the fashionable cross-streets that have usurped the exclusiveness of the Avenue. Roddy's greeting was his usual one: "Can you make some magic signs or recite mystic words that will bring me a morning highball?"

"I fancy Walker, having let you in, has the tray already waiting," she replied, motioning him to a silver bell on the low, marble table, which fronted the bench on which she had fixed herself, cross-legged on a pile

of cushions, obviously for half an hour with a book. "You won't mind, will you," she inquired, "if I don't straighten my legs out? It's quite a bother to curl them up this way, you know."

She patted a cushion beside her, inviting him to share the bench, but he declined, propping himself on the edge of the table, so that he faced her.

"I can never enjoy a highball when I'm too close to a woman," he explained. "One distracts my attention from the other, consequently I miss something of both."

"I can't fancy you failing to exact the utmost from either," she retorted.

"You flatter my vanity and in the same breath shame my faults. For the moment, as Walker is prompt in his response to the summons, I shall disabuse you of your judgment—as to the highball."

She watched him silently while he poised the decanter over a glass. She merely nodded her refusal to his, "Are you joining me?" He poured his portion and added the ginger ale he preferred to soda. "My compliments!" he said, holding his glass slightly toward her. She nodded her permission, her eyes still fixed on him.

"Do you know," he observed, when he had tasted his drink, "I never see a woman—a pretty woman, that is—posed on a cushion pedestal as you are, in the posture of a female Buddha, or the wife of some Hindu god, that I don't wonder what sinister deviltry she ponders. If I should come across you, like that, in a Hindu Temple of Gold, or behind the altars along

some Path of Auspiciousness, I should feel the urge to make a sacrifice to you—of a maiden widow, or a first-born girl child, or something of the sort, to propitiate you."

The lines at each corner of her lips deepened, and her soft, silvery laugh seemed to blend into the winter garden perfumes.

"Admirable, Roddy!" she exclaimed merrily. "Your overture is magnificent. I am all prepared for the play. Finish your highball, pour yourself another, fix one for me, without ice, please, so it will be ready if I need it, and then you may tell me the evil you are going to accuse me of pondering."

His expression didn't change. He obeyed the first of her injunctions, and emptied his glass. When he had also filled it again, and another for her, which she motioned him to put aside, in reserve, he remarked: "I refuse to be so abrupt."

"Then you really have some new accusation. Is it very serious this time, Roddy?"

"I repeat," he insisted, "that even if you do spoil my carefully thought-out approach, I shall not be deterred from getting my information in my own leisurely way. Let us talk of something extraneous—of the girl of last night, for example. Extraordinary situation, isn't it? Smothered by money and doesn't know where to turn for breath!"

"You are not nearly so good now, Roddy, as you were before!" Yvonne flicked him with the tail of her inscrutable smile, and then prodded him deeper. "It was the girl you were thinking about when you came

in—I don't think she's been off your mind since last night. And if there's any evil in store for her you want to provide it yourself, don't you, Roddy? Isn't that it?"

He put down his glass. "That's good whisky," he observed, "but it dulls one's wits. My strategy seems to be going wrong."

"There!" the woman on the cushions exulted. "You are delightful again, as you always are when you're trapped. Now I shall sip my drink, if I may, while you proceed with your cross-examination. See? I am careless of my wits; I expose them to the same whisky."

"Satire becomes you, wonderfully," he said, regarding her as with a deep sense of appreciation. "Some day a master painter will parody the Madonna with you as his model, and give the world a new masterpiece. Your lips are set just right for him, now. Presently I shall drink a toast especially to everything that isn't Madonna-like about you, since I can do that better than paint. Meanwhile, I admit being curious. Mind you, only curious. What are you going to do with—or to —the girl?"

"Do you think an impulse of last night, born of my own thrill at the riot that must be going on in her mind, must necessarily be so definite as that? With some hidden motive behind it?"

He did not at once reply. His thoughts seemed to have wandered off for a moment. When he spoke again his tone had lost all veneer of banter.

"I do not believe you ever surrendered to an impulse

in your life," he said, his words studiously measured. "There can be nothing in common between you and this girl who has no other mask than her own natural vividness. She's more likely to be a thorn than a foil. So you have a motive as clearly defined as the pretense you are trying to bring into your eyes." Yvonne treated him to her silvery laugh and would have interrupted him, but he went on, calmly: "Brandon is obviously playing a game. I am convinced that he knows where her money came from and why, despite his evasiveness. And I am convinced, too, that you do not, yet you deliberately spin a web for the girl and play spider to the fly. Why?"

If he thought to provoke the woman he cross-examined, Kenilworth was disappointed. She studied him coolly. "I'm not so sure my whisky dulled your wits after all," she observed. "You argue beautifully. I shall give you your triumph. I have a motive. As clearly defined as you picture it. As for the girl herself, I shall probably like her tremendously, though that is of no importance. And it doesn't follow, necessarily, that my motive means evil to her. That will be up to her."

"There's going to be quite a lot put up to her, I should imagine," Kenilworth agreed. "You simply give her an added problem. How does Brandon associate in your plotting?"

"Now, Roddy, I didn't guarantee to go into details. There aren't any, yet. You may be unperturbed, however. Brandon wanted me to ask her to come to me. He doesn't know why I consented—and you won't,

either, until you discover for yourself. Now, then, I'm going to uncurl my legs and come out of my female Hindu goddess pose. It's becoming uncomfortable. So I shall be pondering evil no longer. You observe I do not ask you what your intentions are toward my ward, as I should, but that is because I'll see for myself. I know your procedure perfectly."

He gave her his hand and helped her to her feet. "I have a sense of being completely baffled," he remarked, ruefully. "I learn only what I already knew, and nothing more, except"—suddenly his tone altered—"except that you would torture every living thing and wreck every castle that was ever built in the air if Brandon would hold out his hand to you."

"That," she retorted, "is the highball. Perhaps I had better change my brand of Scotch, after all." But when Kenilworth had gone Yvonne dropped into the nearest chair. Had he returned and studied her, at any time during the next half hour, he would have concluded that there could be no doubt about it this time; she pondered.

It was late in the afternoon when Walker stood behind his mistress, who was serving tea to a small company of men and women around the same stone table, in the winter garden, on which Kenilworth had perched himself earlier in the day. "The mademoiselle who is expected has arrived," the butler murmured.

Yvonne rose at once. "I shall be back in time for a cigarette, at least," she added to her excuses. She crossed her drawing-room, from its entrance into the winter garden, just in time to see Teddy Dorminster,

the one who was born a lord but could persuade no one to consider the coincidence seriously, come to a standstill before the slight, girlish figure that stood directly in his path from the reception hall, where he had just turned over his coat and stick to Walker, across the room to the garden. Teddy Dorminster kept none of his secrets or his enthusiasms to himself. He brought a new store of both on his daily droppings-in at Yvonne's—hers was, in a measure, a continuously open house when she was in town.

The newcomer stared into Joanna's face frankly. He fumbled in his pocket and produced his eye-glass, which he carefully screwed into his eye. Then he scrutinized her again, utterly oblivious to her equally unabashed stare at him.

"Jove!" young Dorminster exclaimed. "What a pretty girl!" Yvonne was in time to hear Joanna's reply:

"How in the world did you ever happen?"

CHAPTER XIV

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

BOTH Joanna and Lord Teddy were startled by Yvonne's peal of laughter. "Now, Teddy, you know what everybody thinks when you're around," she declared. "You must really make up an answer some time." Turning to Joanna, she informed her: "He's not always so bad-mannered, you know. I fancy you'll get along famously. I'll present him as Lord Dorminster, but you must just call him Teddy —it fits him better." To the man, who struck Joanna as something of an overgrown youth, she added: "This is my new protégé, one I'm going to be very fond of—Miss Manners. After awhile you'll be calling her Joanna."

Lord Teddy was embarrassment and contrition. "Oh, I say!" he fumbled, "I thought it would be someone who—ah—that you were having to sing, or dance, or do something like that you know, tomorrow night perhaps. Didn't know she was a friend. Sorry, terribly."

Joanna, who had scant ideas of what one does at a meeting with a lord, even a Teddy sort of one, scrambled desperately for what she would have termed, concisely, the right come-back. She was disturbed, too, by that apology for supposing her as one who had come

to sing, or to dance, "or something like that." It implied something, she didn't know what, but something, about her that wasn't as it should be. Yvonne shot a frown at Dorminster and went to her rescue.

"Run along now, Teddy," she commanded. "There's tea or alcohol, whichever you prefer, in the garden. You know everybody in there. Miss Manners will remember, anyhow, that you were perfectly in earnest despite your rudeness."

He wanted to add something to his apology, to straighten it out, but Yvonne bustled him off unceremoniously. To Joanna she said:

"He's a dear, is Teddy. He follows me around the world. He says wherever I am some husband's wife needs consolation and it's his duty to be on hand. And he declares he's perfectly sincere about it."

She talked on, saying things that were meaningless to Joanna, the obvious things that had to do with the beginnings of a new friendship, and the prospects of a "jolly" time for the girl in a new life. A trim, lace-aproned and white head-dressed maid answered Yvonne's summons and replied to her mistress's question that Miss Manners' apartment was in order.

"I've a little bedroom and a cozy sitting room for you, not too far from my own," Yvonne explained. "I hope you will be no end comfortable."

At a finger touch a gold panel in the wall of the reception hall slid back, disclosing a tiny gilt elevator of the kind that is automatic. The maid followed them into the lift and pushed the buttons that sent it climbing to an upper floor. Joanna was strangely tremu-

lous. She wanted to say bright things to the older woman who was ushering her into these new and luxuriant surroundings, but her mind was in an uneasy turmoil. Why was everything happening as it was? So naturally, so swiftly, so smoothly? Should she trust herself to Yvonne Coutant?

She stole a glance at the woman who stood so close to her, and comprehended her extraordinary fascination; the hair that was as black as vulcanite, the magnolia-white face contrasting sharply with the two luminous black eyes, and the lips that were full and red without the exaggerations of lip-stick contours. The fear that vibrated through her at times with Brandon, the indubitable fear that seemed so unreasonable, gripped her for a second.

When the little gold car stopped and the maid had slid open the narrow grilled door, Joanna had dispersed her doubts. The arrogance came back into her eyes and to her lips. She'd get on, and O. K., or she'd take an awful wallop trying.

It was difficult for "Miss 27" to understand, for a time, that the exquisite miniature drawing room, rose shaded and satin hung, with windows looking down upon an open garden, was to be exclusively hers. With John, through such evenings as she had consented to stay in with him, she had planned, or, rather, listened to him plan, the house that he would some day build for them. They had endowed this dream house with many idle fancies, but in her visions there had been no such splendors as the "little" room, with its rose bedroom and canopied bed beyond the softly

draped doors, which Yvonne had prepared for her. And Yvonne was saying:

"You will want your own maid, of course. But I haven't engaged one. You will want to engage her yourself. I fancy Walker can send you a collection of them—he has a way of producing them when they're needed. I shall advise a French girl, or an English one. The first will be more skillful, the other more loyal."

Joanna couldn't stifle her laugh. "You'll have to tell me what to do with a maid," she explained. Then something like a phantom of tears hovered suddenly in the deep brown eyes. "You know, I feel terribly alone," she said, "and terribly afraid—of myself, I mean."

Yvonne swept the girl's face with a quick glance. She spoke quietly to the maid who fluttered about the room. The maid went out, closing the door behind her. To Joanna, Yvonne said: "Come and sit down." She indicated the divan beside her. "If you'd like one there are cigarettes in the box on the tabouret. I think I'll have one, too." Before she spoke again she drew a contemplative puff and allowed the smoke to curl slowly from her lips. Joanna watched her silently. Her first words were abrupt.

"There are a great many people who enjoy themselves talking about me," she said. "And some of them take an especial delight in talking in whispers. What do you know of me?"

These were tactics that would not disconcert Joanna. She was too accustomed to making sudden at-

tacks herself, or defending them. "Only what everybody knows," she replied, frankly. "We read about you, you know, and your pictures always are in the newspapers. I've thought more of you than I ever did of a motion picture star, and that's a lot."

"Why?"

This was more difficult. The girl hesitated, faltered. Again Yvonne's voice, clear, bell-like, clipped the one word:

"Why?"

"I think," Joanna ventured, "it's because you make people talk about you. Wherever you go, and whatever you do, people talk about it. It's being famous. Not for what you do. And you have such a wonderful round of pleasure."

Yvonne contemplated her cigarette again, following the lazy drifting of its wraith of smoke. "No," she said, "that is not the reason you have been interested in me; and it is not the reason you were so willing to come to me, when I invited you." A smile suddenly played at her mouth and she nodded at the girl on the divan beside her. "Is it?" she insisted.

Joanna smiled back at her. "No, I don't think it is, altogether," she agreed brightly, "but that is as close as I can put it into words. You see, all my life, that is, since I've been alone, and making my own way, I've had to fight hard to keep up with the crowd. I've wanted things that cost money, and I've wanted things that you can't have, or enjoy, when you're skimped. The things you need to make a show. The best I could ever do was owe somebody installments

on a dress or a wrap or my shoes, and keep my eyes open for runs in my stockings. I've looked all right, and I've laughed a lot, but things have always happened to make me cry, too."

Again that bell-like voice of the elder girl clipped off a question: "What, for example?"

Joanna studied a moment, her eyes looking out into the room. "They were such little things," she protested; "things you wouldn't understand."

"I think I would understand," Yvonne persisted.

"But you wouldn't," Joanna argued. "One like you simply couldn't. I've cried my fool eyes out, often, because some man—some boy I liked wouldn't stay square. And I've had nobody to talk anything over with. Mostly, people who are worth while to talk to make me tired—I mean, they don't know. When I cut my hair they thought I cut off my morals, and if I go off alone on a party they think I ought to be in a harem. When they tell me I don't act like the girls of yesterday I have to say who cares a hang about yesterday when there are so many todays and then I'm told I'm just plain bad. Once in a while I get so cut up about it that I have to have a cry." She thought she finished lamely. She smiled a little at the futility of her explanations. But Yvonne displayed no amusement. She said, very quietly:

"And don't you think that I am cut up a bit, now and then, when the people who are worth while, as you describe them, interpret me as both plain bad and fancy bad? Perhaps I am. There are different ways to view everything, but—well!" she broke off, and was silent

for a brief moment: "Well, you see that I do understand, after all," she added. And then: "You were glad to come to me because you think I am of today, and not yesterday; that I am the proof of all your little theories of what a woman ought to be today—isn't that it?"

Joanna's reply was eagerly grateful: "Yes. That is what I tried to say. I want to be able to do as I please and not be criticized."

Yvonne rose and crushed the fire from her cigarette. "That's all the talk we shall need, I think," she said. "We shall enjoy each other tremendously, I imagine. Shall we go down to the winter garden? There will be somebody besides Teddy Dorminster still there."

Joanna was conscious of something having been said, of some confidence reached out to her by Yvonne, which she had not fully understood. She was puzzled, as if she had been confronted by some subtle challenge that masked a strategy. For an instant she was at the point of breaking away, of running away regardless of the two trunks, a shining new one and a shabby old one, which had been lifted down from her taxicab. This impulse subsided immediately, however. She decided that after awhile she would understand Yvonne, perfectly.

And after awhile, a long time after, Joanna did!

In the winter garden the group Yvonne had left around the stone table had broken up. Only Teddy Dorminster and two others remained. One of these was presented by Yvonne as Pendleton. Joanna thought him a very unaffable person. The other be-

sides Dorminster was a woman, who was easily more than twenty-five but could not possibly have been forty. Yvonne identified her as Mrs. Marks. "Jove!" Lord Teddy exclaimed when Yvonne had named them for Joanna. "I've thought of something clever!"

"Think it over carefully, Teddy," Yvonne admonished him, "before you reveal it. You're so often mistaken."

"But this is excellent," the irrepressible Lord Teddy insisted. "Positively ripping. Pendleton, here, and Doris, Doris Marks—don't you see?"

"Only that both are of a mind that alcohol is better than tea," Yvonne informed him. "And also that the tea I have poured for Miss Manners is waiting to be passed!"

"A thousand pardons, Miss Manners—by the way, is it quite all right for me to repeat now what I let escape from me a few minutes ago? About your being a devilish pretty girl, you know? I was telling Pen here— Ah, that clever thing I thought of. I must tell you what it was before I forget it."

"One thing at a time," Yvonne insisted. "What were you telling Pen?"

"That I'd just seen the kind of a face that no man could forget after he'd once held it in his hands, close up to him. Isn't that what I said, Pen, old boy?"

"You said nothing of the sort, or spoke of any face whatever," Pendleton gravely assured him.

"Perhaps I didn't," Teddy admitted. "But I thought it, and meant to say it. Miss Manners will consider that I did."

Here Mrs. Marks interjected: "If she sees much of you, Teddy, she probably will have enough to remember of what you actually do say, without being bothered with what you merely think."

"Don't alarm her, please!" Lord Teddy exclaimed. "No woman ever remembers anything I say to her."

"They don't dare, perhaps," Pendleton observed.

"Both you and Doris—" Teddy began, and broke off. "Pendleton and Doris," he said again, "that brings me back to my clever thing. Listen, everyone: Pendleton and Doris Marks; whenever I come upon Pendleton here at Yvonne's I come upon Doris Marks. Pen-marks! Isn't that clever? Pen-marks! What?"

It was only Lord Teddy himself who laughed, and Joanna wondered why.

CHAPTER XV

JOANNA USES HER KNEES

IT was not long before Lord Teddy had skillfully maneuvered Joanna from the stone tea table in the winter garden into a tête-à-tête corner of the drawing room. "Never could stand Pendleton, you know," he confided to her when he had held a flame for her cigarette. "Can't see what Doris sees in him, or he in her, for that matter. Can you?"

"Is that how it is?" Joanna inquired. "You see everybody's fresh news to me, now. I have to wait for signs."

Lord Teddy eyed her intently. She felt singularly at ease with this exuberant young man. She laughed at him brightly when he protested:

"Oh, really, now! You mustn't pretend that. I'm dreadfully dumb when a young woman declares that she doesn't know everything! It's never true these days, you know, and it's a lot jollier to not make believe!"

"I'll admit," she agreed, "that anything I don't know hurts. I've tried not to miss anything, but I have, a lot. So there's still a chance for you to do a bit of teaching. You may start with Mr. Pendleton and—was it Mrs. or Miss Marks? What was wrong about your Pen-marks?"

"Do you know," he observed, moving from his chair to a place closer to her on the divan into which she had settled, "I'm going to be terribly fond of you before long."

"Yes, I'm sure of that," she informed him. "I can see the signs. Anyhow, teachers always are, aren't they? But you were saying——"

"About Pen-marks? It's 'Mrs.' Marks, of course. You'll probably see the other part of her tomorrow night? You'll be here, won't you?"

"I'll probably be here, but I don't know what's happening. Is it whatever you thought a while ago I might be coming to sing or dance for? I must find out yet what you think, especially about singers and dancers."

"Yvonne's giving something or other; usual thing. Doris will be on deck with her husband; he's not a bad sort, but a bit empty. She and Pen will be miserable trying to keep up appearances. It's beastly, of course, for anybody to have husbands and wives about, but these two moon about it so openly they're delightful."

"Is he—married, too?"

"Profoundly! He has to be more surreptitious than any husband I know. You'll be fearfully amused by the two of them, Pen and Doris, when you're used to them. They're always about some place for tea. That's why I really was clever, you know."

"And it doesn't make any difference—to anybody, to their friends, like Miss Coutant, and people who know of the husband and wife?"

Lord Teddy examined the girl beside him deliberately. He noted all the distinguishing patterns of her. His eyes dwelt particularly, for an instant that barely could have been measured, on a smartly silken knee, hardly yet escaped from the angular sharpness that is youth—but threatening to come out altogether from within the confines of a modishly meager dress. His glance, sweeping upward in its lightning appraisals, hovered joyously upon her mouth, that was almost round because of the full, scarlet curving of the lower lip and the deep, perfect bow of the upper one—a spash of color as if someone had crushed a red rose there.

She knew what he was doing. She felt his eyes wherever they rested. Not a muscle of her twitched, but she was conscious of an exquisite thrill of satisfaction with herself. The knee had never before, upon such an occasion—and why were skirts worn short and lips shaped like round rosebuds, and a gown fashioned so carefully, if not for open consideration?—the knee had never been so beautifully sheathed in a silk so perfect, and the lips never so deftly toned and balanced.

When he was satisfied of his observations, which occupied hardly more than a brief hesitation, Lord Teddy moved closer on the cushioned divan—only the knee, which was crossed and pointed his way, halted him. His voice, when he spoke, was little above a murmur.

"Please," he pleaded, "don't let us pretend. It's much nicer not to, really. You do it splendidly, but you couldn't be wholly successful. When a woman has

had so much experience, old enough, you know, so that a man knows there's nothing new under either the sun or the moon for her, then she has to pretend that she hasn't yet learned that everything is what it is and not what's in copy books. If she didn't she'd be too forbidding, so we know she's serious about it. But when a lovely girl makes believe she doesn't understand everything and everybody we know she's just mocking. Because she thinks she does, anyway. Don't you?"

Joanna regarded him elaborately, frankly imitating his own examination of her a moment before. "Yes," she said, her inscrutable smile playing upon him. "Then you have a way with you—as a teacher. I suppose you've a diploma, or some good references, or things like that?" His ready laughter bubbled through his mask of seriousness.

"Only experience, my lovely Joanna," he said, finding her hand among the cushions and taking possession of it with both of his own. "My experience will have to be your guide, and yours my ambition." When he finished he gave her limp, fragile fingers a confidential pressure, and looked into her shining eyes with a deep smolder in his. She seemed to be unconcerned about her hand. She even moved her knee, a little, to help him cut down the space between them. She said, then:

"We seem to be making a bargain of some sort. When you happen to think about it, tell me what it is, won't you? The best I can get out of it is that you want to be a guide and you've ambitions of some

kind. I like ambitions tremendously. It's so much fun flattening them out!"

"Yes," he admitted. "You'd flatten out almost anybody, I should imagine. You wouldn't be afraid of missing anything. That's why I'd like it awfully if—" She nodded at him. "I know," she finished for him. "If I'd give you my other hand, too, and let you fill up the rest of the distance between us. Then you could tell me just how pretty you think I am, and how you've always been crazy about hair like mine and you'd like to run your fingers through it, and maybe you'd have something new along that line that I'd never heard before and then you'd end up by saying I was just made for somebody to love a lot and you're somebody. Have I forgotten anything?"

"Not a thing," he declared. "When do we begin?"

This time they laughed together buoyantly. Joanna decided she was going to enjoy this fair-haired, ebullient young man whose chief aim in life, according to Yvonne, was consoling neglected wives. He was amazingly handsome, as easily read—to her—as an open book, and, she was convinced, utterly harmless. Yvonne's picture of him puzzled her. She concluded he would be easily in his thirties, but, already she was becoming accustomed to older men than her "dancing boys" had been. John always had appeared older to her than any of the other chaps she knew, although he wasn't, in years. She was astonished, secretly, at her own ability to be interesting to men who must have served many apprenticeships at more dazzling shrines than hers.

She was still disturbed by that ready supposition of his at their sudden meeting earlier in the afternoon. She reminded him of it again, and declared that she wouldn't be satisfied with him until he had made satisfactory explanations. He was not abashed.

"You were such a surprise," he assured her. "Not at all like the usual girl one sees about, in places. I'm fearfully fed up, you know, on girls, most girls, I mean. They've lost their enthusiasms. You're enthusiastic. Sort of caught me up sharply with it. And you haven't been spoiled. The girls one meets nowadays seem to be spoiled; that is, too many of them. The kind I know. They're the daughters of the crowd that has chow dogs, you know. Funny, but it's always struck me that when a woman gets a chow dog her daughter goes to the devil. Really doesn't go to the devil, you know, but tries to act like she has been to him and found him too old-fashioned to be amusing. Now you're different. As soon as I saw you I was sure there were no chows in your family. Are there?"

"Not having the family, there aren't any," she said, quietly.

"Righto! There's a reference for you. You see I'm always right about women. You're a flapper without a chow background. There's a heap of difference. If I were a literary chap, now, I'd put that in a book, or something. As it is you'll have to figure it out yourself.

"It's deeper than I usually go. I thought you must be something different, and I couldn't think of any-

thing but singing girls and dancing girls. As a rule they've got sense, anyway. The débutantes that imitate them haven't—by the same rule. Now am I forgiven?"

"I never forgive a man anything," she declared promptly. "It always makes him dangerous."

"That's your difference," he discovered eagerly. "The kind of girl I don't like, the kind that isn't near so daring as you are, is the one who's always trying to forgive. They say it adds to excitement."

Yvonne's voice interrupted. She dropped into a chair and surveyed the pair on the divan. "You two seem to be hitting it off quite satisfactorily," she commented. "No entangling confidences, I hope." Of Joanna, she asked: "He's relieved himself of his own admirations for his pun at Doris and Pen, I suppose?"

"We'd just started on them when we cut all preliminaries and got down to ourselves," Teddy informed her ingenuously. "We've made progress. I shall be here tomorrow, promptly at four—to continue matters."

"You will not!" Yvonne corrected him. "Miss Manners—by the way, have you made it 'Joanna' yet? I see that you have!—Well, then, Joanna has a day mapped out. There are some important things to attend to. And you can run along now, Teddy, if you will. You may fix yourself a drink on your way out."

When he was gone Yvonne and Joanna took up the "important" matters of the morrow; the automobile, its chauffeur—"I'll find you one," Yvonne agreed—and a descent upon a famous jewelry house.

"There'll be a crowd here tomorrow night," Yvonne explained. "That's what Teddy was referring to. I'm making it a big crowd in your honor. I'd already planned a night of it, but I've elaborated for you. You'll meet everyone and they'll meet you. I'll have an unmarried senator and two married ones, without their wives; a few exiled Russian princes, and a smattering of their princesses. You'll like the Russian girls. Some South Americans who will make you think, always, of sapphires or black diamonds, and everybody who's in love with me or wants to be. That'll make a representative party. I'm keen to know how you'll like it, the crowd, I mean. Between Brandon and Roddy, to say nothing of Teddy, you'll be well presented. I fancy you'll be properly admired."

Joanna looked up sharply at the mention of Brandon and Kenilworth. She detected a change in Yvonne's tone as she pronounced the names. She wanted to ask her about these two, for she knew Yvonne shared with Brandon, at least, some intrigue concerning her. But she thought better of the impulse. Her thoughts went back to John.

"Have him come to you here, by all means," Yvonne insisted, shrewdly. "I fancy he is a young man who will require handling, if you continue to be concerned about him. Shall you—be much concerned about him?"

The suddenness of the challenge caught Joanna off her guard. She dropped her eyes. All at once she was conscious that her lips were quivering, and that she was concerned. It wasn't quite straight in her

mind, but she had put away something Teddy Dorminster had said for later consideration, and it came back to her, now, a little confusedly. She was enthusiastic. "But a flapper without a chow dog background. And you haven't been spoiled."

She wondered why John had not understood as well as Teddy Dorminster. She decided she'd find out, soon.

"I shan't be so much concerned," she said to Yvonne, "that I'll go around hunting sad music."

CHAPTER XVI

A GIRL IN EGGLESTON'S HOUSE

IT is only in the great capitals of the world that one may witness, or participate in, a gathering such as Yvonne Coutant delighted occasionally to preside over in her town house off the Avenue. They are not uncommon in Paris where a Prince of India may at any time transform a miniature palace in the Bois into an exotic fairyland for a wild, barbaric fête. They were brilliant punctuations in the Bohemian calendar of old Vienna, and in London, occasionally, a regnant beauty, perhaps a manikin newly married to a duke, or a young duchess divorced from one, will celebrate by turning one night into enough extravagance to keep Mayfair gossiping for a month.

In America they rarely are accomplished. The demimondaine of Paris and the diplomat from London are not unaccustomed to ignoring the barrier between them when occasion arises. It is an extraordinary hostess, in America, who successfully can bring together all grades of society, not rich and poor, so much, as the good and the not-so-good.

Yvonne Coutant was one of these. She had no scruples when she opened her house as to who came into it. She demanded only beauty, external grace, and a willingness to be an appropriate picture for the shining, glittering frame she provided.

"One simply cannot afford not to be in on one of Yvonne's affairs," Mrs. Brownley-Smith, of the Polo crowd, repeatedly said. "One's husband is sure to be there, and so is his favorite of the moment. I always go in order to discover who Tom's loving now. It's the only way I have of checking up on the fluctuations of his taste."

Yvonne's own latest former husband, Alfred Coutant, the novelist, never missed her entertainments. "I get at least four chapters from every one of them," he would explain. "She's awfully good to let me come —sort of pally like, you know."

So it was that an interesting company moved about among the roses and lilies and daffodils that filled every corner of the spacious house, with fragrant baskets of thick, flaming carnations relieving the paleness of the throats of women. And so it was that Joanna stood, arms outstretched that she might realize the line and symmetry of them, before the long mirror in her dressing room upstairs. Her slim body was vibrant with memories of the day and eagerness for the night. In her eyes were all the ecstasies. Strewn around her were the things from the shops—more gorgeous things from more gorgeous shops than she alone could ever have discovered. It was from them she had made her choice—or Yvonne had made it for her—and she stood, before the glass, a soft, mellow vision of lace and chiffons fashioned by deft fingers and cunning brains to emphasize that beauty of girlhood that only a sculptor could display more alluringly or frankly. On the dressing table before her were spread

the souvenirs of an hour with Yvonne in the great jewelry store; wristlets of diamonds, rubies and sapphires; necklets of platinum chains as thin as the sheerness of lingerie, with shining gems in their delicate pendants.

From all of these Yvonne had chosen a single ornament, a rope of shimmering pearls that wound once around the slender, pertly poised neck.

"Miss 27 of the silks," had completed her transition and awaited her summons into the magic world below—the magic world where money bought a smile and a kiss bought pearls like hers.

While Joanna stood before her mirror Andrew Eggleston sat at the long, carved table in the somber-toned library of his house—which was not off the Avenue, but still on it, stubborn ghost of the days when the Avenue was jealous of its exclusive rank.

Joanna's eyes caressed the loveliness her mirror reflected; a loveliness that epitomized, as in alabaster dust, all the pretenses of her kind. Through the filmy web of chiffons youthful limb-lines showed through the cunningness of the couturière's mask for them; gold brown hair, hugged close to the restless head, delicately arched eyebrows shaped as only a painter could conceive them; lips and arms and bare shoulders a marvelous ensemble of enticement.

Eggleston, in the heavy library room, also eyed a vision—also the figure of a girl, and of Joanna's age—but of a long time ago. The girl the banker watched looked down at him from a canvas, held in its massive frame over the great fireplace. There was no dancing

in her eyes, but a wistfulness that seemed to reach out to the man who gazed like a quavering beam of mellow radiance. The lips were blood red, and full, and shaped for a kiss, but they were not scarlet, nor voluptuous. They were as if there was no such thing as a lip stick. The hair was brown, shimmering, as Joanna's, but it was not bobbed—but piled in glorious opulence.

The banker, who would have been young when this girl in the gold frame was young, passed his hand across his brow to break a spell with which the girl in the painting encompassed him. Then his attention fell to bits of paper spread before him like the jewels on Joanna's dressing table. One by one he picked them up and read them—read the canceled checks which signified the purchases Joanna had made that day, checks that had been hurriedly cashed so the girl might take her purchases away with her. They totaled thousands, many thousands. At the jewelry store alone Joanna had spent more than a tenth of her million dollars.

"The play is to be a tragedy after all!"

It was said quietly, evenly, but there was just a nuance in the tone that might have been repressed exultation. The speaker stood behind the banker, a figure in faultless evening clothes, silk hatted, white gloved. About his lips played the wraith of a smile—a cynical smile. In his eyes there was amusement. Just at that moment an ancient butler appeared at the library door and spoke:

"Your car has arrived, Mr. Brandon."

Eggleston started. "You will be seeing her, tonight, then?" he asked calmly.

"Yes. She will be plunged into the abyss tonight, by her new friend, Yvonne Coutant. She will swim like a sinuous mermaid through the sordid senses of half a score of old men whose lips she'll moisten with the sight of her, and half a hundred young men who will make wagers as to which will be first to break her. The end is in sight tonight."

Eggleston did not reply for a moment. He raised his glance, again, to the girl in the painting. Then he said, heavily:

"Still, I'd like to see her—here, in this room. Arrange, some way, to bring her tomorrow."

Brandon bowed slightly and went out to his car at the curb. He gave his order briefly: "To Miss Coutant."

Meanwhile Joanna, before her mirror, waited to be summoned to the old men, and to the young men, and to their young women and old, downstairs.

Yvonne appeared in the doorway. The younger girl gave a little gasp when she saw her. In contrast to the soft white tones of Joanna's gown Yvonne's was a shining black velvet that clung to the curve of her figure like a sheath, giving her vulcanite hair its complement. Her shoulders and uncovered back shone boldly and glistening white.

"You will be something of a sensation, tonight, my dear!" the older woman exclaimed, when Joanna had walked across the room, and had whirled and stood

still for her inspection. Joanna was much too happy to reply.

Yvonne's appearance among her guests was the signal for dancing to begin—also for the breaking down of barriers built by formalities. Women who had gathered in stiff little groups to discuss other women or the escapades of other women were swept away to their first dance and their first drink, and the first round of their preferred flirtations. The big drawing room had been made into a dancing room. In the winter garden the only lights were flickering lanterns hidden among the foliage. Great palms made screens across corners of the drawing- and sitting rooms, and in the hallways. "Yvonne," said Mrs. Brownley-Smith, "knows that two people never have to fumble for conversation when they're hidden behind palms."

As Yvonne moved through her rooms, with a word here and a nod there, her eyes sought a single face. When she failed to find it she spoke to the butler who stood at the post in the reception hall. The man gave her the information she sought.

"Mr. Brandon has just arrived, Madame."

She went at once, stopping only for a subtle challenge to a judge who, that day had delivered from his bench a heavy homily upon the frailty of a modern mother, to a door that led off from the reception hall into a tiny room which, after the Continental fashion, she called a morning room, reserved for her own exclusive use. Brandon stood by a cabinet with a siphon and glass in his hands. He turned to greet her.

She went directly up to him. He gave her an in-

timate glance, that not only appraised her, but estimated every artifice of her. For an instant she swayed toward him, yielding, expectant. But she read in his face that he would not take her in his arms. She was immediately self-possessed. Gayly she fluttered her fingers across her own lips and then touched them, lightly, to his. "Am I pleasing to my lord?" she demanded, dropping him a mock curtsey.

"That's an idle pretense, the question," he replied. "What you really want to know is, are you tempting?"

"A woman never asks that," she returned. "She needs no help to satisfy any such curiosity."

"I fancy that point might be argued," he observed, "but we will compromise. You are very beautiful, which pleases me, and very alluring, which gratifies you. What more shall either of us desire?"

Some quick reply, perhaps a reminder of some sort, hovered at her lips, but died unspoken. "Nothing else," she said, "and thank you. If I have done my own attractions justice perhaps you will agree that I have done even more—that I have made two women beautiful, tonight, for your satisfaction."

"You mean the girl, of course. But why are you challenging me—with her?"

She looked up at him, steadily. She spoke softly. There was no trace of bitterness, or, even accusation, in her tone, but there was something feline in it. "I believe you are going to tear this girl to pieces, if you can. Why, I don't know—but I think you are going to try. But I am of the opinion, my dear, that it won't be so easy!" When she paused, she turned away from

him slightly. There was a tinge of color in her pale cheeks.

"You are absurd," Brandon said evenly. "And, I think, just a bit piqued. It is a delightful mood. If one of us should make the girl unhappy, I fancy it is more likely to be you than I."

She gave him a bright smile. The color had gone from her cheeks, and she was taunting again. "Now you are accusing me of jealousy. I'm never jealous, my friend. Not even of you. I served you willingly in luring her to me. Teddy Dorminster and Roddy Kenilworth already are devoted to her. Teddy has assured me he's willing to trade all his married women, in one grand cluster, for her. And Roddy declares that she is more refreshing than champagne. So you must admit I'm generous—two of my devotees already are at her feet. And you are hovering about them. I shall——"

She paused. For some reason she decided, suddenly, to light a cigarette and point toward the cabinet where glasses and bottles were. "A bit of wine, please," she commanded. When he had brought her glass he said:

"You were about to say something interesting. Finish it."

"I was about to add that probably I shall learn some things I really want to know, because of Joanna. Come. It is time she made her entrance. Everybody has had just enough to drink to fully appreciate her."

Together they passed into the reception foyer. Through the wide flung doors, in which palms were banked, strains of dance music floated down from an

orchestra hidden on a miniature balcony that crowned one end of the high-ceilinged room reaching off on either side from the upper landing of a broad, handsome stairway that sloped down majestically into the drawing-room itself. "A woman always looks her best when she is descending a stairway," was one of Yvonne's pet assertions. She had had this one especially built into her house.

At the fringe of the dancing crowd in the larger room Dorminster and Roddy Kenilworth talked together, both men searching the throng of guests for their hostess. Lord Teddy spied her, and Brandon, immediately. Both asked for Joanna when they had hurried to pay their compliments. "A little patience," Yvonne remonstrated. And she admonished them: "There must be no stealing her away for selfish confidences. I want her to know everyone, tonight."

Brandon touched her arm. "Here is someone who will make his own rules, perhaps, about an hour alone with her," he said, indicating a young man, who had just delivered his hat and coat to the doorman and who, evidently a stranger in a strange house, seemed not to know what to do with himself.

Yvonne did not know the newcomer, and looked at him curiously. Like the other men, he was in evening clothes, but in his manner was that intangible something which betrays the one whose full dress is only an occasional ceremony. Always quick with her appraisals Yvonne decided in a flash that the stranger would not be one, if he were concerned, with whom a woman might safely play. She was amused with her-

self, however, for admitting such an idle reflection, and puzzled by it. Brandon, who had greeted the other, brought him to her for presentation.

"Mr. Wilmore," he said. "You have heard me, and, no doubt, Miss Manners speak of him."

Yvonne, with characteristic impulse, gave him both her hands, a gesture which brought a flush into his face. Her voice and smile were warm. "This would be John," she said. "You see I have only heard Joanna call you that. She has been very eager for your coming. She is just about to make her first appearance."

John plainly was ill at ease. He had expected Joanna to be waiting for him, and for him alone. He was not prepared for this sort of introduction into her new surroundings. Brandon chatted with him easily, and brought up Kenilworth and Dorminster. "They have both begun to be amusing to Miss Manners," Brandon explained. "So far, we are her main circle of dependants."

The music that came down from the balcony suddenly died away, leaving a confusion of voices that ends a dance. Already women who shouldn't drink champagne and men who insisted that they do, were giving hints of the effects of it. But, as unexpectedly as the music had subsided, there was a general commotion, and then a hush. The four men, John among them, stepped through the palm-flanked doorway and into the larger room. Yvonne, completely beautiful, a striking figure in the shimmer of her black and the sparkle of the diamonds at her throat, stood a few steps

up on the stairway. Her voice, silver tinkling in it, floated over the assemblage—the assemblage of those who were good and not-so-good:

"My friends," she called to them, "I am in a daring mood tonight. Just how, and why, some of you will determine quickly. I am about to present to you something that is very fragile, and new, and fresh, and something eager to be shaped into the best fashions of the day. It is just a girl whom I have taken very close to me and who thinks that she should be like me. Some of you will disagree with her, and, perhaps, plan to make her different. Others will have ideas of their own. I commend her, to all of you—and am curious to know whether it shall be you, or her, who profits most."

She raised her jeweled hand, while the murmur of wondering voices grew, and gave a signal.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GIRL ON THE STAIRWAY

TO make of Joanna's appearance a dramatic entrance, openly stage-managed, evidently was a secret impulse of Yvonne's. Joanna had expected nothing of the kind. She waited, unsuspecting in her white and gold boudoir. Yvonne had said: "Give them time to decide who's to be nice to who. Then the few in whom you will be most interested will take you in hand."

When a maid, hurriedly posted to catch Yvonne's signal, informed Joanna that she was expected, she hurried down the stairs from the upper floor and onto the balcony from which the grand staircase descended. She was still framed in the doorway when she realized that the people in the great room below were waiting for her, Joanna, their faces uplifted.

She caught her breath. A hand flew nervously to her throat. She would have drawn back but instantly realized that she was too late. Yvonne caught her glance and, with a nod, reassured her.

Then exhilaration leaped through her stirred pulses. The carnival spirit of the scene below reached up and encompassed her. A new ecstasy of happiness quivered at her fingertips, in her toes, and throughout the vibrant warmth of her. This was to be her setting,

symbol of the scintillating festival of which her life was to be forever shaped. These people, people of her new world, were waiting down there to welcome her among them and their kind. Bravado came into her eyes, and arrogance dimpled her cheeks. She moved over to the first step, between the curled and carving stair posts, and stood for a moment perfectly still. Then she blew a kiss down into the room.

"A lorelei coming out of her shell," Brandon murmured.

"Gad! She carries it off as if she had been born to masquerade!" Kenilworth exclaimed. It was not Roddy's habit to enthuse over a woman except in her presence. He considered it a spendthrift waste of energy. Brandon shot a sharp glance at him. He noted that Roddy was rigid, his lips slightly parted, and that he breathed heavily.

Joanna moved down the stairs slowly, a softly graceful figure that was taunting in its suppleness and the flagrance of its challenge to women in that room who would have yielded much of whatever was precious to them to have caught from her the least of her fascinations—the least of the beauties her confident arrogance emphasized.

Someone, a man, clapped his hands. Immediately another leaped toward the steps. Teddy Dorminster broke away from Brandon and Kenilworth and John, and swept past Yvonne, beating his rival to the girl's side. Before she knew his purpose Teddy had caught her up in his arms. For an instant her eyes flashed and she gave signs of scrambling to her feet, but she

smothered the impulse. Teddy held her gracefully, easily, as if he were not unused to such performance. She settled in his arms and steadied her body by throwing a hand around his shoulder. Her golden slippered feet and silken expanse above them hung lax. When she looked into Teddy's face it was with only mock reproof.

A woman, her voice already shrill from champagne, cried: "Bravo!" Another echoed the cry, and then a babble of voices called out to Teddy and to the girl. Men crowded to the stairs, each eager to perform some share of the task of helping Joanna out of Teddy's arms onto the floor. A woman who stood behind John and Brandon said to her companion, loud enough to be overheard:

"One of Teddy's best points is that he can love a woman as he has carried that one, without mussing her." John's face grew a little whiter and his fingers twitched nervously. He saw that when Teddy had put her down his arm lingered for a moment around the girl; that he held her close to him while he whispered and that Joanna brushed his cheek with the back of her hand playfully. The woman whom John had overheard spoke again: "Teddy is beginning a campaign. He always does it with a whisper. Whoever this girl is, and whatever she is, there are some people here tonight who will hate her—if Teddy shows signs of following up that little tableau."

John turned to look at the speaker. She returned his glance and started at what she saw in his face. Then she was amused. She said something to her

companion, a man who quite evidently would not be her husband. He surveyed John curiously. He spoke in a low tone: "Yes. You probably are right. He's in love with the girl. Odd looking chap, but one who would make trouble if he felt like it."

Both Brandon and John sought to make their way to where Joanna stood, the center of a throng of men and women, some fascinated, as was Teddy Dorminster by her amazing beauty and freshness, and others paying their sycophantic dues to Yvonne by fawning upon her protégée. But neither reached her side before she was whirled into a dance by Lord Teddy. He surrendered her, after a few turns, to others who pressed forward for the privilege.

Men were fulsome in their compliments. The mystery of her was the intriguing subject to which everyone led along the route of intimate, personal things, things the men murmured softly while she swayed close with them to the music, or whispered so that her ears alone caught them. It had been decided by Yvonne that the history of her sudden shower of gold from an unknown benefactor should not be told. Kenilworth and Brandon, and the few others of Yvonne's intimates who knew, agreed to keep the secret. Dorminster had not been taken into anyone's confidence as to Joanna's wealth. The men who made their devotions to her, and the women who were curiously pleasant, soon gave up their efforts to fathom her after failing in such hints as: "Have you known Yvonne Coutant a very long time? Do you belong in New York, or are you

from elsewhere?" The men returned gleefully to their sentimental venturings.

When a score of toasts in punch had been drunk to her, and she had flitted from one pair of arms to another in the dancing, Joanna became conscious of an unfamiliar quality in the murmured admirations heaped upon her. She had been accustomed to the tentative probings, of the boys in her old crowd, and their frankly said and usually sincerely meant flatteries. "You're a swell girl!" was what she had learned to expect. Her acknowledgment customarily was prompt and was perhaps: "Is that the best line you've got?" She knew the danger of the threat, or the safety, in every compliment, as her dancing boys paid them, and usually she guided them well away from the edge. But now she felt that her wits must grapple for new understandings. The men who captured her for few fleeting moments sung their adorations in a more elusive melody. The words of their praises seemed harmless; but she sensed new meanings. Roddy Kenilworth took both of her hands and held her a little way from him and looked at her. All that he said, was:

"You are very pretty tonight. That dress you are wearing must have been created just for you by a really great artist."

Nothing more. Yet Joanna was conscious that she trembled; and was conscious, too, that she had been faithful to the present-day mode which required that underneath that dress she wear but a single garment, so delicate and sheer that it almost blended into her

skin. Roddy said only that she was pretty and her dress becoming. Yet she understood that the man who was speaking, and who had bantered her but a few nights before with the threat of his pursuit of her, already wanted to take her slim body into his arms and crush it. She decided she would have to strengthen her battlements. She had learned to make her lips provocative, and to use her knowledge boldly and saucily. She had the sense that in this order of life, so different from the domain of the silk counter and its flirtations, it was much more dangerous to be provocative.

The majority of the men were, of course, only silly. Especially, those who were obviously important men of affairs and who amused Joanna with their common adoption of one phrase, "I wish my wife were like you." Three in succession! One who confided to her that he was an attorney, representing "some of our very large interests"; another whose name was magic in a store that competed with the one she had left; even Pendleton, who had been both a diplomat and a statesman.

As he breathed his response to her buoyant and restless youth Pendleton indicated to her a pretty woman who probably was forty, but looked thirty, and who seemed, in some intangible way, to be not very happy. Joanna saw that her eyes always followed her husband. Joanna thought she would like Mrs. Pendleton. And she didn't like Pendleton. She gave him an unexpected acknowledgment of his "If

my wife were like you I'd know how really to enjoy being in love!"

"Haven't you ever talked that over with anyone? Just for example, Mrs. Marks?"

Offense colored in his face immediately. But the girl in front of him was laughing up at him so brightly that he was helpless.

"Because Doris happens occasionally to meet me for tea," he protested, "doesn't necessarily mean that we have confidence. Anyhow, can't we forget everyone else, for this minute you have given me?"

Joanna couldn't, she told him, and left him with a parting sally. A moment later she timidly touched Mrs. Pendleton on the arm. "You won't mind, will you," she asked Pendleton's wife, "if I say that I want to know you? You see," she lied, "I have met Mr. Pendleton, and he was good enough to think you might like me. I wish you would."

The older woman was plainly confused, but recovered instantly. She took one of the girl's hands between both her own.

"Why, that is sweet of you, my dear!" she exclaimed warmly. She was openly delighted by the pretty enthusiasm of the young girl who was the night's most frivolous butterfly. She was afraid she would go down in the torrent that seethed about her—a torrent that glittered and swept up laughter, luxury and extravagance, and the stakes of many gambles in love. This fear suddenly distressed Mrs. Pendleton.

When Kenilworth found opportunity to claim her again he saw that the first excitements of Joanna's

triumph in her success among these friends of Yvonne's had subsided, and that she was troubled. She denied it, when he accused her, but almost immediately afterwards admitted it. She had missed John. Brandon had talked with her but a few moments, resigning her gracefully to others who were insistent because of their third and fourth drinks. He had not mentioned that John had come and had watched her entrance down the stairs and hilarious reception. Neither had Kenilworth, and Yvonne seemed suddenly to have disappeared from among her guests. Joanna began to want to go up to her boudoir and nurse the pain of her disappointment. She could not restrain a little cry when Roddy told her John was there.

"But where is he?" she exclaimed. "Please, won't you keep people away from me while we find him? He couldn't have gone."

They looked in the dim lit winter garden, peopled with couples whose moods were for faint lights, and in the other rooms that had been thrown open. Brandon, too, had missed him, and so had Dorminster. Roddy, failing to glimpse Yvonne in any of the rooms, decided to seek her out in the morning room, off the reception hall, the little retreat of which few of her guests knew and to which none had admission but Kenilworth and Brandon. Roddy was convinced John would not have gone, even if he avoided Joanna, without a word to his hostess.

When Joanna saw him in the center of the room she was suddenly angry, despite her eagerness. She would not forgive him, readily, she decided, for ignor-

ing her. Then she realized that she could do nothing but forgive. Yvonne, who had sat directly in front of him, curled in her great soft chair, rose when she and Roddy entered.

"I've been enjoying this boy of yours tremendously," she said to Joanna. Joanna went quietly up to John. She was biting her lips to keep them from trembling. Yvonne, from where Roddy awaited her, added: "He wanted to run away but I've managed to keep him!"

Joanna's lips quieted, a little grimly. Something of weariness came into her eyes, lingered there a moment, and then vanished quickly. She took John's hands. She had intended to kiss him, but led him to a couch, instead, and put him down beside her. "Now tell me," she commanded, "why you have stayed away from me. I have been so happy, expecting you every minute."

"I wanted to, Jo," he said, simply, "particularly because it has been hard for me to put off telling you how sorry I am for the things I thought when I heard of the wonderful thing that happened to you. I should have known better but I just couldn't believe. I would have come before tonight but you wouldn't let me, you know, and now, of course, I know why. I thought, when I saw you, and the people around you, that I would just go along. There will be no room for me any more."

"You're going to scold again," Joanna complained. "Won't you kiss me, first? You haven't kissed me, John, for a long time now, days and days it seems. And I don't want to be scolded tonight."

Perhaps he would have resisted her, if he could.

But there would be few indeed who could have withstood the appeal of her. John gathered her to him and held her. Her hands pressed against his breast—her old trick which sometimes had been a pretense.

Suddenly he put her away from him. Even put away the arm she hastily flung over his shoulder. When she saw how white his face was she understood why he couldn't, just then, make words.

"Now," she said, softly, "you must tell me why you were going away without even coming up to me."

"Because, Jo," he answered, "you already have gone away from me. I have tried to see it differently, but that's the way it is. When I came here, tonight, I thought we would have our hours together—I didn't know it was to be an affair like this. And that you had planned for me to find you in the very midst of the sort of thing you like—that fits you so well."

Joanna settled back, patiently and quietly. The deep brown settled in her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

A KISS

"THEN you don't like my happiness?" Joanna said. "You don't want me to have what my money has made possible for me?"

"I haven't said anything with that meaning," John declared. "I want nothing else in the world so much as I want you to have happiness but I wish you could have with it something of real joy; something of the joy of doing things, big things, out of the opportunities that have come your way. Money will mean one thing to you; it would mean something else to me. As it so often does where love is the bargain, it has come between us."

"You mean that because of this we must give up—give up each other?" She was still very quiet, and patient.

"What else can we do? How is there any room, or place for me? The little house, with a parlor and kitchen that we planned would hardly be serviceable to you now, would it?"

"But, John, we could still build that same house. That is one thing I want to do, right away." She smiled a little. "Only we can make it larger, and with more to it than just a kitchen and parlor—fountains

and gardens, and balconies, and the stairways and the paneled halls we used to joke about when we saw them in the movies. We can have all those things now, John, that we laughed over. It will be just the house we planned, enlarged to fit my million. Will there be anything wrong about that?"

She saw the stubbornness she always hated settle deeper in his eyes. "No," he returned. "It can't be worked out that way, Jo. I'd never live with you in a house you'd paid for, even with money given you for a reason that I hope will turn out to be all right. You see, I, too, have plans. You know them, even if you never cared much about listening. I've got to make my way. The career I want is one that can't be bought. You can't give it to me like you would a birthday present. Different, you see, from yours."

She looked at him with widened eyes. She wondered at her own calm. She was not hurt, as she had been that night at Mrs. Adams' when John repulsed her. He was not doing that sort of thing again. Now he was quietly, stubbornly taking himself out of her life.

A wild impulse to run upstairs, wrap herself in a cloak and run out into the street with him, thrilled her for a moment and then lapsed into the deadly calm that puzzled her.

"But, John," she said, "I love you. I have always loved you. Why must you make such a fuss about the money? It won't change me, not so much as it has changed you."

He interrupted her: "That's just it! It won't change

you. It has only brought you out of yourself and revealed you. This sort of thing won't get you any place in the end. It is not the background for a girl, no matter how good she is—and I believe, Jo, as I always have, that you're good. You will stay good just as long as you can. I shall always want you, but I just can't have you. Can I?"

"Then you won't be coming back, you won't accept things as they are and come back to me?" she asked.

"If you still want me, when I have made my own way, and have money of my own, I will be wanting you," he said, slowly. She probed his words and understood what he really meant. "You mean," she said, "that you will want me enough, even, to take me no matter what I shall have become by then? Isn't that it?"

He wouldn't answer her. She continued:

"Was it because you think that I ought to be drab, and a killjoy, and go into a shell and hide except when some prudish chaperon is satisfied that I have enough clothes outside of me and enough false shyness inside of me to make it safe for her to take me out for a walk in a churchyard, that you spent more than an hour shut away in here with Yvonne? She doesn't walk about with her eyes on the ground and her mind on the purities of the lily. Didn't you suffer—all alone with her?"

"We were talking of you," he replied, shortly.

"Yes," she retorted, her eyes narrowed a bit; "there's a man who coaxed me into the winter garden just a little while ago, and spent the whole time talk-

ing of his wife." She knew that she was being utterly foolish, and childish, and irrelevant. But, still, she watched John curiously.

"When I told her I was going and wanted to say good night, as I should, she brought me in here. Before I realized it I got to telling her how much I love you and why I can't have you. That was all. She told me, of course, that I was a fool. She is one who would think so."

"And so am I, John," Joanna agreed, quickly.

Kenilworth opened the door. When he saw that John was still there, he would have gone away and closed the door behind him. Joanna called him back.

"Mr. Wilmore is just leaving," she explained, eying John coolly. "And I don't want to go out and dance just yet. I want you to stay in here and talk to me."

It would have been an awkward moment if Roddy had been one ever at a loss to meet any situation. His wisdoms seldom failed. He chaffed her and said good night to the younger man with an ease that cleared the atmosphere. When John went out Joanna did not get up from the couch. She held out her hand to him and when he took it she wrapped her fingers about his and held them for a moment. There were no words between them.

Roddy went over and gently closed the door. When he stood over the girl her head had dropped onto her arm. She had drawn her knees under her. As Roddy took note of her he concluded that just then she was not thinking of herself, or of anything about herself. Instinctively he sensed the slow swaying of a scale

beam, weighed at either end with two precious bits of magic. And he knew that one end of the scale was slowly dropping. He wondered which end would be heaviest.

Without a warning rustle the limp figure on the couch straightened and rose. Roddy knew how the scale had turned. He was startled by the change in Joanna. Her poise was new and almost regal. There was something haughty and defiant and dangerous in her.

"I wonder," she asked him, stirring him with a look from between her lids that he had not caught before, "if you would think me very foolish if I should ask you to do a very silly thing."

His answer was the obvious one.

"I want you to kiss me," she said.

He drew her up to him instantly. His lips had almost brushed hers when she suddenly pressed him back—again that trick with her hands. "I want to tell you something, first," she exclaimed. "It isn't you, Roddy, that I want to kiss me—anyone would do just now. There's something on my lips, something that was put there a little while ago, I want taken off—it needs a kiss to do it. Because you happen to be here I am asking you. You see, I must be fair to you—since I am doing the asking."

"One explains a kiss afterwards, never before"; he murmured and caught her hands and held them. She yielded her lips completely. She felt that she was being wrapped in a burst of flame. She closed her eyes so that she would not see what was in his, but she gave

herself to the caress without stint. When he released her she said:

"There! You mustn't spoil it by demanding another. I want to go out to the party, now, and dance. And I am going to flirt outrageously with Teddy Dorminster. He has been begging me to discover how sentimental he can be all evening. But I still want you to do something else for me. I want you to make sure that Yvonne knows you kissed me."

Within half an hour Joanna was hidden away in the safest corner of the winter garden with young Teddy. She had promised him only fifteen minutes. She granted him but a few more despite his pleadings that one couldn't crowd an eternity into such a short space of time. She insisted that he find Brandon and bring him to her. "He has not been nice to me, tonight," she explained. "And I want to be nice too." She laughed at that rhetorical mix-up and sent him away.

Roddy Kenilworth, when he had turned her over to Dorminster, went back into the morning room. When he had made himself a drink, he settled back in a chair and fell to studying the ceiling. When Yvonne looked in he explained that his brain had become twisted around a conundrum and that he couldn't take an interest in anything or anybody until he'd straightened it out.

When the hilarious guests, some of them frankly boisterous, began to reassemble into their original groupings and say their good nights, Joanna's gorgeous gown was crushed, her shimmering hair fluffed, and her face sparkling. The night had been like wine to her,

and she was vital with the stimulus of it. Dorminster wanted to linger at his parting, but she mocked at him. When she saw that his face clouded she was prettily penitent and gave him her hand to kiss. To Kenilworth she was more serious. She looked up at him rather shyly.

"You know," he said, "I am taking a very marvelous memory with me."

"Be good to it," was all the comfort she would give him.

Yvonne was confessedly weary. They talked until the sun broke into Yvonne's boudoir. Then Joanna, in her tight fitting pajamas and transparent, rolled down boudoir socks, obeyed Yvonne's command that she run along for at least two hours of sleep. She didn't sleep, however, but sat in her canopied bed, her knees drawn up, her chin resting on them. Martha, her own maid, found her sitting there on the unmussed coverlets which were just as they had been turned down the night before, the warm sunlight bathing her figure and making a gay caprice of her gold-brown head. The pearls still glistened around her throat. A flower that had remained pinned to her dress throughout the evening was crushed on the floor. Joanna saw Martha come in but looked at her blankly for almost a minute before she comprehended her. Then she curtly ordered her bath.

Brandon had arranged with her for the visit, that day, to Eggleston at his home on the Avenue. They planned for her to pick him up at his own office in a downtown skyscraper and drive him in her new and

smart cabriolet to the Eggleston mansion. This appointment had been for one o'clock, as they were to lunch with the banker. The cabriolet, with his chauffeur in gray that matched the silken loveliness within, drew up in front of Yvonne's shortly after eleven.

Joanna, soft and graceful and elegant in beautiful fox trimmed mole, a little black hat pulled down over her eyes and carrying a pliant swagger stick in her hand, tripped lightly down the steps and into her car.

She made her driver put his head inside the door while she gave him instructions—orders that seemed explanation and repetition.

The car did not go at once down the Avenue toward the office building where Brandon, later, would be waiting for her. Instead it turned into one of the drab streets, also avenues, but only in name, and moved swiftly between the pillars of the elevated railroad into neighborhoods most visited by delivery and freight vans. It came at last to a cross-street which pierced a district of tenements of the better grade—old dwellings made into furnished rooms and cramped housekeeping flats; much the kind of homes as that which had been Joanna's, at Mrs. Adams'.

The chauffeur scanned the house numbers. Joanna gave him more directions through her speaking tube. He stopped just beyond a corner and opened the cabriolet door.

"It is the fourth house from here, on this side," Joanna explained. "There'll be an old woman with a rag tied around her head come to the door—if any

of the children answer you tell them to get the old woman. She's all right, if she doesn't think you're an officer come to take her in for having a flowerpot or something on the fire escape, so you'd better stick this money in her hands as soon as she sees you. Then she'll tell you if Mr. Wilmore is in. If he is, give her another bill and tell her to keep her mouth shut. If he isn't tell her that I'm coming in to talk to her."

CHAPTER XIX

A BIT OF BLUE DRAWING PAPER

FROM her silken cushions in the cabriolet Joanna waited impatiently until her chauffeur returned. The man said:

"Mr. Wilmore is not at home."

"Then you may wait for me here."

A half score of street urchins already had gathered about the smartly shining cabriolet. The girl smiled at the urchins, pushed through them, and disappeared into the depths of the house where John had found for himself a tiny sleeping room and another, a larger one, with the precious north light for his workroom.

During the days John served at his apprenticeship with the firm of architects who provided him his necessary training. His talents were recognized. A bright future was predicted for him. But, so far, John's returns had been indeed meager—as is the usual condition of the student of a difficult profession. If, at times, Foreman, Van Brent & Craig were dubious of their young John Wilmore, it was because he was inclined to be a dreamer. That is, they, his tutors and employers, were of the mind that he was much too eager to skip such fundamentals as the proper angle of a drain pipe to contemplate monumental harmonies.

Perhaps John would have agreed with the wiser

heads that guided him through his student possibilities. Perhaps that was why he confined his dreaming, as far as possible, to his one large room, and worked there over his drawing board, with his blue prints and tracers —by the north light in the early mornings, and the incandescent light through the evenings that had not been Joanna's.

The "old woman" who faced the girl with the swagger stick in the drab hallway might have been, were she not so frankly frowsy, a replica of Mrs. Adams. She once had been on the stage. The flood gates of her wondrous memories were ever at the point of lifting. Between her and "John's girl" barriers had broken down forever when Joanna, who on more than one occasion sat through an evening with John in his workroom, trying as best she could to fathom the things he talked about, made her come in and recount the triumphs of old with its curtain calls and its jealousies and marvelous romances. Joanna admitted to John, at that time, that she would much rather hear his landlady's monologue than listen to him rave about gargoyles and such musty things.

The landlady was convincingly dramatic when she identified "John's girl" in the radiant vision which smiled so sweetly at her. There was, even, thrilling drama in her elaborate service to the code that "asks no questions and gets no snubbing." She measured Joanna from smart little hat to smart, sapphire-buttoned suèdes, and reached her own conclusions over the swagger stick, but she said only:

"Of course you can, Miss. You can go right in. Mr.

John's been gone since breakfast. He hasn't been doing much work of late, it seems, because he's kind of restless like."

For some mysterious reason the landlady's gaze rested on the sapphire slipper buckles, as if the depths of them contained the explanation of her lodger's sudden idleness.

"I know that Mr. John will have nothing to say about the likes of you paying his rooms a visit whenever you wants."

"But that is what you must help me about," Joanna announced. "I don't want him to know that I have been here. You must make a little plot with me not to tell him. If you say that you won't, I know I may trust you."

As to this the landlady was not at all sure. Her watery, shrewd eyes narrowed a little and appraised the face of the girl who, plainly, wasn't "John's girl" any more.

"Well, now," she temporized, "as to that, Miss, I'll have to think a bit. A man's house is his castle, like I used to say in the old days when I was ingenue for Raymond Hitchcock who, I must say, had his pick of ingenues and knew how to do the picking."

"But it will be all right," Joanna protested. "John and I haven't any secrets—you see, I'm still 'John's girl,' and always will be, no matter what happens, although he has another notion just now. This must be a secret from him, your secret and mine, and it's just something I want that he mustn't know about for a little while." She gave the landlady the full benefit

of a smile and a pleading from deep brown eyes that were irresistible. Grudgingly the woman gave in, shrugged her angular shoulders and agreed that if "that's the way it is, I guess it'll be all right. I don't think you'll find any love letters from other girls. Mr. John's not that way with girls."

Joanna opened her handbag and added to the bills which already crumpled in the landlady's hand, left there by the chauffeur, a much larger one. Then she tripped up the stairs to the door through which John had delighted, in the past, occasionally to usher her.

When she crossed the threshold she faltered. For an instant Joanna Manners, girl of mystery and money, was "Miss 27" again, violating all the conventions of a more particular age and stealing in with John to cuddle up on his frayed sofa and listen while he built wonderful structures that reached to the sky as surely as ever did a castle that grew up in Spain. On most of those nights she would have preferred to be out dancing. They were, in a way, her sacrifices. She'd told him, once, that if he'd put his drawing board away and use the big room to practice up on his fox trot he'd make a bigger hit.

Joanna brushed this reminiscence away with the back of her hand, passing it petulantly across her forehead. She crossed the room to a huge chest of drawers in which John kept his papers, great sheets of blue print, plans, and tracings.

As if she well knew the contents of those drawers Joanna plunged her gray gloved fingers directly in among a sheaf of papers in a middle drawer. When

she brought them out they brought also a big blue square on which there were lines and diagrams in a confusion that many times had wearied her eyes. There were other sheets that were similarly marked, as if they were duplicates on which infinitesimal alterations had been made. Joanna had chosen one of them, seemingly at random, and appeared to be satisfied.

Ruthlessly, careless of her deadly affront to the smoothness of an architect's drawing, she folded the blue print into a minute square and thrust it, crumpled, into her bag. Then she turned back to the door.

Just for a moment she stopped and dropped into a corner of the sofa. She pulled her legs under her and curled up. She patted a place in a cushion and rested her elbow in it and propped her head on her hand. And as if she were talking to someone who sat or stood in front of the drawing board over by the window, she murmured, softly:

"John, dear, you're such a tiresome old thing! I can't get all that stuff straight in my head at all. Why don't you come over and tell me how much you think you love me?"

When she had said this out into the empty room she got up from the sofa and went swiftly out, closing the door behind her, softly.

The landlady hovered about in the hall. Joanna nodded to her and said, "I found what I wanted. It'll be all right—some day. Remember your promise—it's to be a secret between us—that I was here. John will never miss what I took."

When her car drew up at the skyscraper Brandon

was waiting. He climbed in beside her, paid his compliments, and the cabriolet sped toward the Avenue. Brandon caught one of her hands and gave it a gentle pressure.

"Do you know," he said, "you were very nice to me last night. I was beginning to be afraid that you would never decide to accept me as one of your very necessary evils."

"And you think I have made up my mind that you are not to be baffled," she challenged him. "Perhaps I have. At any rate I'm not going to be afraid of you, but that doesn't mean that I don't know that I ought to be. But just now I am not thinking of you, but of Mr. Eggleston. I want him to like me, and I wonder why he has asked me to see him."

She was not watching him, but she sensed a quick glance that took her in from head to foot. "I rather imagine," he said, "that most anyone you want to admire you, will. It may be that even your banker will lose his heart to you. Have you decided, too, upon that?"

"No," she said, very seriously, as if she were considering the matter deeply; "I would never want an old man to lose his heart to me. The kind who do are always silly and wicked. And Mr. Eggleston isn't that sort. I'm dreadfully frightened of him, of the thing he knows, who gave me the money and why, but when I sit before him I feel as if there was something between us, something that isn't money. I don't know how to describe it, but it's something that makes me want to be liked by him, and trusted. He doesn't

seem like a banker at all. I think all the things people have always said about him, his being so hard and cruel and merciless, are unjust."

"Yet I have known him to send a man to suicide by refusing his plea for a few paltry dollars to save him from bankruptcy. And I've seen him torture a woman who came to him to ask a condescension from the bank that would have saved her from the contempt of her husband. I've known great institutions to fall overnight because he wouldn't lift his hand to save them."

"Yes," Joanna agreed; "he would do that. Just as 'Mr. Good Morning,' the buyer in the store, sent a pretty girl to prison for stealing a pair of baby's silk socks. We girls at the counter took up a collection to pay her fine when we heard there was really a baby the socks were intended for, but when we told 'Mr. Good Morning' about it he snapped our heads off and threatened to fire every one of us if we dared to do such a thing. But just the same her fine was paid and she got off, and I almost gave him a date when I found out that he paid out of his own pocket what he wouldn't let us pay, and charged himself with three pairs of baby's socks and a baby's silk dress besides. Some men are that way, you know."

Brandon laughed, a short, insolent laugh that made Joanna hate him anew. "I would advise," he said, "that you never let your banker catch you in a hole that you needed getting out of. You would do better to depend upon—shall I say the obvious thing?—me."

She turned and looked at him, deliberately. "If there was a hole for me to stumble into," she said,

"you'd be the very one to push me in. And you would do the pushing with a kiss." Then she smiled, brightly, at him. "Still, I'm going to be very nice to you, you know."

Much of her reliance went out of her, however, when she stood in the center of the massive library of Eggleston's mansion. She was a very little thing, and, she realized, a very frivolous thing, silhouetted in the great quiet room that seemed to resent the smartness and the youth of her. She wanted to talk in a whisper when Brandon came and stood near her. When her eyes, in a furtive survey of the far corners of the room, fell upon the face of the girl in the gold frame over the huge fireplace, a strange sensation stole along her pulses. She wished that she could hide her swagger stick. Somehow, she wished that she had left it in the cabriolet, outside.

CHAPTER XX

IN EGGLESTON'S HOME

A BUTLER, the ancient one whose years identified him with the old house, brought word that Mr. Eggleston would join them shortly, if they would wait. Brandon, when the old man had disappeared noiselessly, held out his cigarette case to Joanna. She shook her head.

"No, not in here," she said. "Somehow, it doesn't seem as if—as if one smoked in this house, does it?"

"That is a curious feeling," he observed. "I don't imagine my esteemed uncle smokes them, but I fancy he is not unused to them. Surely you would not adopt a pose of innocence because of visionary regard for your banker's tastes?"

"No," she replied, "I wouldn't do that. But, just the same, I don't want to smoke."

She moved away from the table to a window. Brandon, eying her closely, saw that as she crossed the room her glance fell again on the painting over the fireplace. She looked from the window into the avenue, then suddenly turned and went up to the fireplace. The action was as if in response to some occult summons from the girl who looked down, so serenely, from the canvas.

Joanna rested her hand on the mantel ledge and

gazed up into the face in the portrait. It was a picture that might have amused her, with its prim, voluminous skirts from under which a boot-toe peeped; its leg-o'-mutton sleeves and absurdly tiny waist that almost shrieked aloud of the corsets of yesterday. All of this Joanna, sometime, would have laughed at, as at a school-day valentine. To her there never had been anything quite so ridiculously funny as any sort of fashion that had become passé—clothes, girls or conventions.

But Brandon, who had dropped his cigarette into a gold ash tray and moved softly to one side of the room where, under pretense of examining a book, he might furtively watch the girl at the fireplace, saw nothing of amusement in her face. Instead he fancied that some of the wistfulness of the girl in the painting had reached down to the other. "Do you know who she is—I mean, who she was?" The voice seemed to float gently on the stillness of the room.

Brandon didn't answer at once. Joanna did not notice his silence. "She fascinates me," she said, still dreamily. "There is something about her face that reminds me of someone—I don't know who. It makes me want to think."

There was a sound at the door. Eggleston entered the room. Brandon made no sign. He glanced from the girl to the banker, and then watched them both.

Eggleston halted abruptly when he saw Joanna and that she was lost in contemplation of the girl in the painting. He looked at Brandon, a mute inquiry in his eyes. Brandon shook his head. Eggleston stood,

quietly, his head lowered a bit so that his study of the girl at the fireplace, whose back was partly turned to him, had the effect of an inner as well as outward scrutiny.

Suddenly, as if she were startled, Joanna wheeled and met the banker's stare. A hand fluttered nervously to her breast. For a brief moment she trembled, as it frightened. "I knew—that you were watching me." she breathed.

Brandon dropped his book.

"The atmosphere is charged," he remarked, dryly. "I am confronted with moods. Miss Manners refuses to smoke despite the fact that on our way here she stopped to buy a charmingly expensive holder with emeralds. Now my uncle is detached." To Eggleston he continued: "I hope your luncheon is not to be a heavy affair!"

Joanna was confused. She wanted to refute that accusation that it was the house of her host that oppressed her.

Eggleston rescued her with a stiff, formal greeting that ignored Brandon's allusions.

Joanna made a valiant effort to throw off the shyness that constantly threatened her in the presence of the great banker who knew the secret of her mystery. She knew, instinctively, that she had not been asked to visit him, at his home, without some very definite reason. But whatever this reason might be, she was convinced that it, also, would be kept from her. Eggleston's phrases were formal, cold; yet, now and then she was sure she detected something in his man-

ner—that was quite all that she could determine about it, that it was, simply, "something." As yet the mind of "Miss 27" had not become expertly analytical.

"I understand," the banker said when they had taken their place at the table in a massive room as somber as the library, "that you definitely were launched last night, and that you were quite a success."

"It was glorious!" Joanna agreed. "Miss Coutant is very good to me."

"You have not, then, formed any substantial ambitions. You are the trustee of a fortune. I am interested in your immediate future."

Joanna looked up, quickly. "I should be willing to follow any instruction you give me," she said, quietly. "If you give me none, I can do nothing else but enjoy myself. I have wanted always little things that I couldn't have. Now that I may have the big ones that are better, I shall have them—that's all I can do, it seems."

"As your banker," Eggleston returned, "I am wondering if, since that is your inclination, some of your securities should not be turned into cash. Already you have expended some $130,000. If you continue at that rate you will need more money. You must give me my instructions."

Joanna saw that Brandon was watching her furtively. She felt the need of a defense, but, instead, plunged into an offensive.

"I am going to spend a great deal of money," she said. "There are so many things to buy, and money doesn't seem to count for much in Miss Coutant's

world." She was silent a moment, then asked suddenly:

"How far does a million dollars go, Mr. Eggleston?"

"Not very far," he replied, "when entrusted to the three companions, Vanity, Extravagance, and Desire. They, I believe, are the chief advisers of the young women of this day."

"Are they?" Joanna asked, earnestly. "I have always found that my chief friends were Misunderstanding, Distrust, and Envy."

A great modern banker, a despot whose whim echoed as thunder through the marts of finance, and a modern, younger man, whose pastime was the baffling of feminine artifice, looked across their table into the fresh, young, modern face of a girl who was just blossoming out from "Miss 27" of the silks. The banker, remembered, strangely, a vision of glaring legs and flamboyant rouge that came awkwardly through his office door with the air of one who was being trapped. Brandon remembered the girl who had "no place to go," except to her silk counter or her rooming house. And Joanna understood why they looked at her.

She smiled at them both. "I couldn't say that so easily," she explained brightly, "if it wasn't that I'd read, some place, that those three things were particularly wicked. I recognized them immediately as the ghosts that were always haunting me. John and Mrs. Adams misunderstood me if I went out and didn't get home until four in the morning. They thought

there couldn't be any place decent for a girl to be after half-past ten.

"If I took a swallow out of their flasks the boys distrusted me when I drew a line they mustn't cross, and said I was fooling or that I wouldn't take the swallow. And a lot of men and women who didn't have the good time when they were young that I tried to have were envious of me because I happened to be young in these days instead of them, so they said I must be bad like all other modern girls. That's the way you count them up, you know—Misunderstanding, Distrust, and Envy. I've always had the three of them in my mind, but I haven't known people, before, to whom I could talk about the things I really feel. I've just known boys, and their talk has been, 'Give me a kiss.' "

"And," Brandon urged, quickly, "your response to that 'line,' as you say, has been——"

Joanna considered a moment. Then she said, as if she were speaking with judicial concern: "It doesn't sound right, I know, but my idea has always been that today a girl shouldn't be afraid of a kiss, because it's better to give and take them, and know what they amount to, than it is to think about them all the time and then take them too seriously, like girls used to do."

Eggleston was silent. Brandon, after he had toyed for a moment with a fork, deftly turned the conversation into a different channel. He invoked a discussion of the people Joanna had met the night before, at Yvonne's.

"And you think," Eggleston asked, "that these people are most desirable? That they represent the bet-

ter things of life, and follow the paths along which a young girl should trod?"

"I don't know," Joanna confessed, briefly. "I've got to find out. At least, they are not downhearted. I hate people who are downhearted. There's time enough for that when the undertaker begins to count on you."

"For you, at least," Eggleston remarked, "there is quite an interval before that time arrives."

"Yes," Joanna agreed, "and when that time does come I want to look back and say O. K. If the money does that for me I'll be satisfied."

"It needed the money, then," Brandon asked, "to make that prospect possible?"

"You can't get anywhere without money, can you? Everybody I know wants nothing else but that. That is, everybody but one."

Eggleston caught her up sharply. "There is one, then?"

"Yes," she replied. "One. But I don't want to talk about him, now."

When they finished their luncheon it was Eggleston who found an excuse for Joanna to stand, for a short time, in the library again. And it was he who maneuvered her so that for a brief moment she stood close to the fireplace beneath the painting in the gold frame. Then he dismissed her. He had asked nothing of her plans, and there had been only the brief discussion of the business of transforming securities into cash. To Brandon, when they were settled in her car, she

said, "He's such a funny old man, isn't he?" Brandon agreed shortly.

They had driven but a few blocks when Joanna unceremoniously put Brandon out of the cabriolet, depositing him on the sidewalk. "I have a terribly secret errand," she explained, "and you must go on alone. You won't mind, will you?" He laughed good humoredly at his dismissal and was comforted by a wave of her hand, through the rear window of her car, as the cabriolet drew away. Then she picked up her speaking tube and gave her order to the driver:

"Go back, as fast as possible, to Mr. Eggleston's—the house we just left."

The afternoon had worn away when Joanna, something very happy shining in her face, came down Eggleston's steps and stepped into her car. If she could have looked back into Eggleston's library, just then, she would have seen him, almost hidden among the darkening shadows of the great room she had just left, standing motionless, his eyes lifted in silent communion with the girl of yesterday in the gold frame.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE GOLDEN GIRL

A WILLFUL beam of mid-morning sun found a crevice between the rose-hued drapes that were intended to keep it out from whatever secrets were within their window, and made straight for a face almost lost in a mound of pillows—pillows of exquisite lace and silk from golden looms.

The vagrant beam gloried in its discovery; in the shimmer it aroused in gold brown hair, in the velvet-white and the startlingly youthful contours of the face so invitingly nestled to its caress.

Brown lashes fluttered under the sun-ray's provocation and a bare white arm, velvet like the face, crept out from some place underneath the shimmering hair. The slender form outlined under the weblike coverlet that also was of a silken lace that may have been priceless, stirred and straightened, revealing the symmetries that were just curving away from boyishness.

A voice that was drowsy but not without its note of petulance, asked: "What time is it?"

Out of the unnatural darkness of the room made by the drawn curtains, another voice, clearly that of a patient servant, answered: "It is quite ten o'clock, Mademoiselle. Shall I open the curtains?"

Again the sleepy voice from the depths of the huge, soft bed: "If you please, Martha."

Martha, very neat and prim in gray morning garb, rose from the edge of the chaise longue where she had perched silently through two hours of waiting for the form in the bed to stir, and pulled the curtain ropes. Like a yellow flood the transfiguring Riviera sun burst through the nest of broad windows that curved out from the room in a semicircle, all shut off together by the heavy shell-pink drapes. Bewildering exotic odors of orange, mimosa and clematis filled the room with the sunshine, each separate fragrance seeming to bring up from the calm Mediterranean down below some ineffable perfume of March morning romance. When Martha turned from the windows the voice from the bed, not sleepy now, but alert, rippling:

"I ought to be dreadfully cross with you, you know, for letting me sleep so late," it said in mock severity; "but I suppose you will say that I looked so comfortable you hated to disturb me."

Martha, American from head to toe despite her "mademoiselle" and her French ribbons and ruffles, looked down on the girl in the big bed; a gleaming, glittering bed of golds and pinks and blues mounted on a dais under a gorgeous canopy of gold lace against pink taffetas. Martha seemed to hover, for a moment, at the edge of a scolding, but dutifully remembered that, after all, the girl in the bed, whose eyes were twinkling up at her was Mademoiselle, and she was Martha. So all she said was:

"Mademoiselle did not return from Prince Michael's until three o'clock this morning."

"That's so!" agreed the voice, emphatically, as if

suddenly reminded. "There was an affair last night, wasn't there? And something happened. I know something happened, because something always does when Michael feels the urge. And Michael was urged, last night, Martha. Very urged. While you run my bath I will try to remember what about. Maybe it was me. If so, I will tell you about it while I splash."

While Martha busied herself with the taps over the pink marble pool in a glistening shower-room, the girl in the bed sat up, drew up her knees until her elbows could rest on them and her chin on her wrists. Her brow wrinkled a little, as if trying to remember. The warm sunshine wrapped the cuddled figure in yellow splendor. Thin shadow lines from the diamond-patterned bars of the clematis trellis outside the windows romped through the filmy, diaphanous chiffon of the girl's pajamas and twisted about her like mischievous fairy arms. Suddenly the puckered brow cleared and a laugh that was as vibrant as music rippled at red lips.

Martha turned off her taps, satisfied at last that the water was just warm enough—her mistress always refused to brave a cold shower—and went up to the bed, a flaming yellow robe of transparent silk over her arm, tiny satin mules in her hand. While she knelt at the bed dais to slip the mules on bare feet, and stood to receive the slim form in the fold of the robe, the voice promised:

"If you haven't made the water too cold, Martha, I'll tell you what it was that happened last night as soon as I'm in it. If it's cold you shan't know a thing."

When the robe had fallen and the pajamas had been tossed, rolled into a ball, at Martha's head, and the splashing in the marble pool began, Martha was merrily informed:

"I stole Prince Michael, Martha! Actually took him right out of Yvonne's arms, almost actually, that is, figuratively speaking or something like that, and ran away with him. Mad flight over the boulevard by the sea at midnight, across Monaco and up the stone road into the Alps. Ooh! Martha, you made it almost too cold. Please turn on a little more warm. It was thrilling, Martha, that wild ride through the moonlight, all alone with the Prince—alone except the driver and he didn't count, of course. And Michael was in a real moonlight mood, too. Because, there, now it's too hot! Why don't they make water just right?

"Because, Martha, we were running away to be married; married in Genoa at dawn and that sort of thing, and we were to come back and face the Grand Duke Nicholas in his villa at Nice and say: 'Lo and behold, Sire! if ever there's another throne in Russia here's a new princess to hang on it!' That's what happened last night, Martha, because Michael had the urge."

Martha's eyes widened and she stared at the bare form splashing in the pool. "But, Mademoiselle!" she protested. "It didn't really happen, did it?"

"Don't be silly, Martha. One has to have a passport to cross the frontier from France into Italy, and one just can't smile one's way past these iron minded

old fogies that stand on guard. Michael forgot all about that, he was so filled with me, and of course I didn't remind him of it. I had all the romantic thrill of a dash to become a bride, knowing I wouldn't have to be a bride-ey at all. Now you may dry me, Martha, but don't rub too hard. I could hardly keep from laughing when Michael lost his argument with the frontier guard and realized he wasn't having any nuptials in the morning."

Martha should have said, merely, "Yes, Mademoiselle!" with a maid servant's reticence, but somehow her mistress was never dignified during that morning bath. So she did not refrain from a prompting, "I should fancy so, Mademoiselle." And her mistress gratified her.

"He turned on me very fierce and solemn and just thundered at me: 'You knew we didn't have our passports. Why didn't you remind me?' He must have seen my lips getting crooked because he said then: 'Joanna Manners, you're a fraud!' But I'm not a fraud, am I, Martha?"

"No, indeed, Mademoiselle!" Martha replied, but even her mistress detected more of hope than conviction in her tone. For one brief instant, while the faithful maid held the thin yellow robe the slender little body was enfolded in her arms. The warmth and pulses of it went straight to her heart and she wished that she could be sure that the girl she had served through a hectic, galloping year, was not—a fraud.

The events of that tempestuous year had reached flamboyant climaxes; the distraught, mystified mis-

tress Martha had sent down the stairs to her first triumphs in Yvonne's house off the Avenue had become the Golden Girl around whom a vortex raged, a glittering, luring feather of paradise in a world of money and madness. And down in the secret recesses of Martha's soul there was a fear that she wished wasn't there. Perhaps this fear would have been subdued; perhaps, it might have been stirred anew, if Martha could have seen a hard, unpleasant shadow that passed swiftly across brown eyes when her mistress caught the note of prayer in her assurance that she was not what the disappointed Prince Michael had dubbed her. But the shadow had gone completely when Joanna was propped again in her mountain of pillows. The sweetness was still in her voice when it commanded: "Now you may bring me some tea."

For a moment the maid hesitated, then announced: "Lord Dorminster has been waiting, Mademoiselle, for much more than an hour. He is in your sitting room."

Joanna was resentful immediately. "Why didn't you send him away? What does he mean by sitting on my doorstep, I mean sitting in my sitting room, at this hour of the day?"

"He assured me that Mademoiselle had told him he might come for her at nine. He is in riding clothes."

"Well, I shan't pile out now for anybody. Put something around me that I won't show through and bring him in. I won't even give him any tea, but I'll make him hold my tray."

Martha sent a hasty glance around the room—a room that was all gold and pink, a spacious background for

the great golden bed with its ceiling of limpid mirrors. There were countless feminine things about, lovely and expensive. Joanna saw Martha's roving glance and laughed at her. "Oh, I shall keep his eyes engaged; don't fear, Martha. He is much too experienced to examine the corners of a young lady's chamber."

When young Lord Dorminster appeared at the bedside Joanna frowned up at him without so much as giving him her fingers.

"What a terrible man you are," she accused him, "to begin on me so early in the morning. Invent me some good reason at once or go away."

"But you told me last night that I might come. At nine, we agreed. You promised to ride to San Remo. It's a gorgeous morning, too."

Joanna considered him judiciously. "Do you know," she said, "you are the most beastly thing I could imagine. You have the most disagreeable habit of reminding one in the morning of what foolish things she says at night. That's not fair, Teddy. Things are so different in the morning."

"Surely you don't expect me to forget all those things you said to me last night?" he exclaimed.

"Of course!" she assured him. "I have, anyway. What did I say last night, Teddy? Here, sit down. You mustn't stand over my bed like that! Hold my toast. If you're good you can feed me a bit now and then. What did I say last night, Teddy?"

"You said you really were becoming fond of me and that after a little while you'd talk seriously with me—about our future, you know."

"I really said that? Give me a bit of toast and let me think how to explain such a distraction."

He was gloomily silent while she disposed of a tiny nibble of her toast. His moroseness was so amusing she had to laugh at him. She reached a finger to his lips, careless of the dropping away from her arm of the robe Martha had wrapped about her. "There, now!" she said, "I remember. I had just had a glass of Burgundy with Roddy Kenilworth. When he wants me to be very generous Roddy always inveigles me up to a sip of burgundy. I detest Roddy for that, but I did promise him I'd play tennis with him this morning. That was such a good promise, Teddy, it delighted him so, that I gave it to you too. If a promise is good one should repeat it, don't you think?"

"No, I don't think," he declared, still morose. "But Roddy's out of it because I'm on deck and he isn't. But it's the other thing you told me that I hope you haven't forgot."

"You mean about my getting fond of you? That doesn't require any immediate making good, does it, Teddy? All right, then, we won't forget that. I'm terribly fond of you and maybe I'll marry you, who knows?"

She considered him a minute and added: "I'm glad you are holding my toast, Teddy. You take everything I say so seriously. Now then, get out of here. I'm going to be dressed. And, evidently since Roddy hasn't remembered this morning any better than I do, I shall have Martha bring me my riding togs."

CHAPTER II

GOSSIP

THE dressing of Joanna, each morning, when she condescended to put herself in the hands of her maids, was an important ceremony. It was not a matter for Martha alone. More capable fingers were required for the toilet rituals of one who was now a regnant beauty.

Even riding togs needed Celeste and Marie. Celeste knew every wave and curl and vagrancy of the shimmering brown hair, and the precise point at which the red lips must arch and retreat. Marie was an encyclopedia of what went with what and when the ensemble was worthy of its details. Between the precisions of both of them their mistress found ample time, each morning, to scan her daily mail.

Always, of course, there were cards from couturières, jewelers, milliners and florists. To be a purveyor to the needs of the Mademoiselle Joanna was, along the Riviera, something like a patent from royalty. It was Marie's duty to put all bills in a pile, when her mistress had glanced at them, and send them to the bank, in New York.

Celeste watched over the engagements her mistress made, and was in a hopeless mess over them. Once, when she was in such dismay that she pleaded with

her mistress for help, Joanna told her: "You must learn, Celeste, that I am not to be asked to do anything I say I'll do. It would be thoroughly impossible."

So, while Lord Dorminster waited some place on the spacious ground of Villa Amette, Celeste and Marie prepared her for her riding togs and Joanna ran her morning's post through her fingers. Only one letter interested her. When she came to this one she dropped the others into a tray held by Marie, and put the one on her dressing table. Then, Celeste having finished with her eyelashes, she closed her eyes.

Through all that lapsed year Joanna watched, each morning, for the envelope that bore the familiar legend of the bank, in New York. It came to her regularly, before she left New York with Yvonne, for London; during the long months in England where Teddy Dorminster had piloted her with Yvonne remaining in London, to the country homes of many of his distinguished relatives; and through her revels in Paris. Each time she recognized it among her letters she carefully went through a set routine.

She would put it aside until her maids were finished with her, or until she could dismiss whoever was near at the moment. Then she would close her eyes and sit very still. Her mind would leap backward and out of her memories summon a procession of things that had happened. She was very careful in her marshaling of this parade. She omitted nothing. In every letter she received with that mark of the bank on the outside she feared there might be the wiping away of all the mystery of her money, or bring, per-

haps, its explanation. She knew, although Eggleston had not encouraged her in this belief, that the explanation would come, some day. And, always, she wanted to be prepared for it. Brandon, still a shadow remaining in the background, had toyed with her in New York, had smiled ironically whenever she repulsed him and, gradually, had wrapped some sort of a net about her which almost strangled her. Kenilworth had been devoted to her; sentimental, brooding, sometimes earnest and sometimes passionately bitter, but Brandon never had lost his head. Kenilworth had said, that first night in New York, that he was going to "play for her." She had accepted the challenge. He had ceased playing and was frankly struggling to break through her battlements.

But Brandon controlled her. This she must always admit. Once or twice, she would remember, they had had a conflict. She had drawn upon every item in her store of artifice and had gambled her lure against his mastery, and, each time, she had almost been the victor. Both times she had brought things into his eyes that were revealing, and too dangerous for her to fight against. His obscure, but seemingly malicious power dominated her again, because she would not risk tempting him.

When she had measured herself through the passing of the year, and weighed the meaning of each step and its influence upon her, she would open her letter and read it.

As usual, what she feared, was not in the one that Marie handed her while Teddy Dorminster waited out

on the grounds. It included, however, a paragraph which she read over and over again.

I enclose herewith a statement of your account as of this date, separated, according to your instructions, into two divisions. Perhaps you will check the longer one, which includes items paid to your order. I have carefully checked the expenditures listed on the second statement and find them correct.

You will notice that with these statements your account would be seriously depleted, but I am to inform you that your benefactor has notified me that a substantial further deposit will be made to your credit. You may assume, therefore, that any requirements you may have will be met promptly. I remain,

Very truly yours,

ANDREW EGGLESTON.

When she understood the meaning of that last paragraph, that she needed more money and it was being given her in the same unexplained way, Joanna hastily glanced at the shorter, or second, of the two statements. She did not examine the listed items, but only the total. Then she crumpled this portion of her accounting into a wad and called Marie. "Bring me a candle, lighted, please," she commanded.

While Marie held the tiny flame before her Joanna held the crumpled wad of paper over it until her fingers were scorched. She watched until the paper ball had burned. Before she would let Marie take the ashes she stirred them into powder with her finger, as if she would run no risk of prying eyes seeking out a secret from the cindered paper.

The other accounting sheet, which bore a long list of bills paid by the bank, she tossed into a drawer. Then she went down to Dorminster.

Villa Amette had long been one of the show places of the Riviera, one of those splendid miniature palaces which nestle in the semi-tropical foliage at the base of Cap Martin, a low, rambling house of balconies, trellised windows, and wide, stately verandas. Its broad acres stretched back onto the slopes of the hill in serried terraces that lost themselves in groves of olive, orange and mimosa. Below was the blue Mediterranean. Gardens of pink blossoms, and squares of red and white roses overhung the sea and bordered the paths that wound through pergolas heavy with fragrant clematis. Only the very rich, and of these only those whose whims were for splendor, ever had braved the cost of a season's rent for the Villa Amette.

Yvonne once before had tenanted this palatial estate. Now she shared it, at her suggestion, with Joanna. Yvonne and Joanna were inseparable and yet there had been few confidences between them. People had learned that to approach the Golden Girl they first must win the favor of Yvonne Coutant. And they wondered a great deal because of this circumstance.

With a groom holding the bridles of the two horses, Dorminster awaited Joanna at the steps of a great door that opened onto the driveway. By the time she came out to him he was sullen. Joanna's eyes danced when she saw his mood. He helped her mount, tossing her to her saddle as easily as if she were a feather and they turned their horses into the road that either crossed

the frontier and went on to San Remo along the sea, or led back to Mentone and Monaco.

"It is too late," Dorminster grumbled, "for so long a ride as San Remo. Shall we go the other way, down into the valley?"

"We'll go no place," she assured him, "unless you decide not to be glum. I want to be talked to this morning. I haven't any particularly engaging thoughts."

"I have," he answered shortly. "It's my thoughts I wanted to talk to you about, this morning. Especially after last night."

"Are you going to remind me again of such foolish things as I may have said to you last night? If so I shall go straightaway back. Roddy will be around some place by now, wanting his tennis."

She made no effort to turn, however, and they rode for a while, horse to horse, silently. Joanna, buoyant with her youth, took long breaths of the scented, lazy breeze that stole up from the sea. But when Dorminster spoke at last she swept him with a quick glance.

"The thought of last night that bothers me is not so much your forgetfulness, as the memory of others. That's what I want to talk about."

She didn't reply, nor did he continue. They rode in silence again, until they turned into a bridle path that went in among the trees in the Condamine, a path that once had guided the Romans under Cæsar to the hiding place of the Christian slave who has since become Ste. Devote, the patron saint of a sanctuary erected

over the spot where she was captured and killed. It is a narrow path. The horses brushed each other as they threaded it. Suddenly Joanna said, softly:

"You love me very much, don't you, Teddy?"

And he answered, again shortly, "Yes."

"It's true, almost, isn't it," she asked, still softly, "that you have stopped loving other women and being loved by them because of me?"

He glanced at her, to see if she were tricking him. He decided she wasn't. "I used to think," he said, "that my mission in life was to love women, but I was mistaken. I've learned that it is better to love one woman, and put whatever qualities I have in her trust. So far I have considered women my duty. I've wanted you to be my refuge. But I've said all that before, haven't I?"

"You have," she agreed; "but you always put some new inflection into it. You are good to look upon, Teddy, about as handsome as a man ought to be, and you are good to listen to when you say you are in love. If I were married I couldn't resist you, I know."

Anger flamed in his eyes and he muttered an oath.

"Oh, I am not fooling with you," she protested earnestly. "I am just reasoning about you. You always make me take you seriously, you know, and I wonder why."

"The obvious answer is, because I am actually serious. So much so, that I don't like what they are talking about today from one end of the Riviera to the other—your escapade last night with Prince Michael, Kenilworth's fascination for you and the affairs of

Yvonne. It's getting nasty. I'd like to get you out of it."

Joanna's eyes surveyed the countryside, slowly, deliberately. The sparkle went out of her face, but there was no other sign that she was perturbed. When she was satisfied with her examination of the landscape, she turned again to the man who rode beside her.

"I hate gossip, Teddy. It's either true or it isn't, and either way it isn't any good. But you may tell me—one by one—what are the things they are saying?"

Another man might have hesitated because of the irony hidden in the girl's voice, but young Dorminster was filled with his grievance. "The usual thing," he answered, "about the incident of the Russian. You left the grounds with him at eleven o'clock, just when his party was at its height, and you didn't show up until hours later. The Prince invariably mixes some vile Russian concoction in his punch, and in his brandies, and everyone had more than enough of both. Their brains were receptive to only one conclusion when you showed up again. Especially when you took him away from Yvonne."

"Why 'especially' for that, Teddy?"

"It gave them a chance to figure up again how many of Yvonne's lovers you have taken away from her. Prince Michael was the last of them. You've got them all now, the crowd included, and they are celebrating your climax in every whispering boudoir and every club bar room from Cannes to Ventimiglia. They make an uglier scandal out of it because they know that

when Yvonne gets ready to turn there'll be some kind of a crash. That's all."

"Not all, Teddy. There's Roddy. You mentioned him. What are they saying about him—and me? Give it all to me while you're about it."

He waited a minute moodily biting his lips, but whatever his hesitations he stubbornly put them aside.

"Yvonne Coutant," he said, "is Kenilworth's handiwork. She was a decent sort until he shaped her to fit his fancies. Whenever she struggles to be free of him he bends a finger and she breaks. It's generally agreed he is planning to do that to you."

CHAPTER III

STARTLING NEWS

HAD young Lord Dorminster been looking into Joanna's face, when he finished, he would have been puzzled by what he saw. She became fire-white. Slowly the brown sheen of her eyes had crept back until they were almost black. The round red lips had set in a straight line. But Teddy didn't look at the girl beside him. The echo of his last words hardly had died when he went into a funk with himself. He looked straight ahead, between his mount's ears, and inwardly cursed.

Teddy Dorminster was not the kind to say that sort of thing about anybody, to anybody, much less repeat it as the gossip of others. He was sorry, and damned his lapse. When he did glance, timidly, at Joanna, her face had cleared, the brown had come back between her lids, and her lips had relaxed. She detected his chagrin at himself and was conscious of his sidelong glance. In mute acknowledgment of both she reached across with her riding crop and patted his sleeve, lightly.

They came, just then, upon the approaches to the little wooden shrine of Ste. Devote. By common impulse, and wordlessly, they pulled up their mounts. Dorminster held his hand for Joanna's foot as she

stepped to the ground. He tied the bridle straps together and followed her when she strolled to a stone bench under a cluster of pepper trees.

"I say!" he exclaimed, shyly; "I'm cut up, you know, about popping off like that! I shouldn't have fouled Kenilworth, and as to Yvonne——"

She interrupted him. "And I shouldn't have asked you," she comforted him, "to tell me the things people were saying. Because, you see, I have known right along. I was only curious to hear if there was anything new. That about Prince Michael and me, was."

"Just the same," he insisted, "it was rotten of me. I'll have to see Kenilworth and tell him what I've said to you. It's the only way."

"You're a stickler for honor, aren't you, Teddy?"

"For the sporting thing, anyway."

"I wonder, sometimes, if you don't think it's just the sporting thing to do, to make believe you are in love with me and that, if I'd let you, you'd make me your countess and be as true as you could be for ever after? I'm vain, and wicked, and frivolous, you know, and I fancy you think it would be sporting to take charge of me, who am all alone, and keep me out of the abyss."

His protests were hot at his lips, and his throat was crammed with things he wanted to say. But her calm look invoked a sudden change of mood. While she waited for him to find the words for which he seemed to be scraping the ground with his crop, the Ste. Devote woods were very peaceful, only the busy chatter of birds breaking the stillness.

"No," he said at last, slowly, as if he carefully

weighed his conclusions, "there's nothing sporting about a man's regard for a woman. It's either honest, or it's not. You can't make a sporting deal out of it either way. I've watched you since that time a year ago when I stumbled into you in Yvonne's drawing room in New York. I've seen you fight for understanding of all the crooked things that went on about you. I could have helped you learn, many times, but I knew you'd fathom everything in your own way. A girl does that, nowadays. There's a lot, perhaps, that I don't know about what's really inside of you, but I've a heart that doesn't grieve over anything my eyes can't see. I wouldn't care, you know, whether you fell into the abyss, or whether you were so innocent you didn't know that anything that shouldn't be, could be. However you are, I'd like, awfully, if you'd marry me. I'm honestly in love with you."

A whimsical smile played with the corners of her mouth. "I remember," she said, "that you promised me, that first day at Yvonne's, that you would be awfully fond of me." The smile disappeared, and left her wistful. "And I remember, too, that you are the only one, Teddy, who has turned out to be just what I thought you'd be. All the rest are different."

"Are you, too, different than you thought you'd be?"

She laughed, gayly, but all she said was, "Heaps!" After awhile she added, "But we mustn't reminisce, Teddy. It may transpire that some day I shall have nothing left but reminiscences. If that happens, I'll want them all saved up. You'll be one of the best of them."

He caught her hand, when she rose, and held her. She did not draw away, but stood quietly, her eyes meeting his. She was so close to him that he felt the warmth and tenderness of her, and that she was almost breathless. For one brief instant his brain went into a riot and he was dizzy. When his head cleared he felt her crushed against him, and realized that it was his own arms that were holding her there, holding her so tightly that already her lips were paling. He would have dropped his arms and released her but she caught them, and let him understand that she was yielding. She was even holding her pale lips to him. When, at last, she stirred, he kissed her again, and then freed her. Before she drew back she said to him:

"I would like to love you, Teddy, and if I could, I would. No one has ever said so fine a thing to me as you have—that you'd not only want me but take me however I am. That is so different than being told that I'm wanted but mustn't be had. I'll remember it, whatever happens."

Before they reached the gates of the Villa Amette grounds Joanna brought up his threat to do the sporting thing with Kenilworth. "I'd rather you'd not tell him that I know what has been in the past between him and Yvonne," she said. "It hasn't interested me at all, you know."

Somehow, Teddy thought, it did interest her. He was foolishly bitter about it, and resentful, which he didn't have a chance to show, however, because they were turning into the villa path and Joanna, with a

flirt of her crop, broke into a final gallop toward the stables.

Dorminster had all the Englishman's love for fine horses. He seldom returned from a ride with Joanna, and these rides through the fragrant beauty of the Riviera hills were as frequent as she would grant, that he did not watch the grooms rub down their horses and perform the countless services which the British stable master finds as necessary to his charges as are the administrations of a watchful maid to the grooming of a dainty mistress.

Both of the steeds they had ridden that morning had been his gifts to the Golden Girl, brought from the Sussex stables he had inherited with his other fortunes. It was significant of him that while Roddy Kenilworth showered her with things made from diamonds at every excuse for a gift—and Brandon, with a finer sense, found rare bits of bijouterie for her delight, Teddy had made it horses, with exquisite trappings coming along in periodical installments.

Joanna left him among the grooms, after an affectionate and appreciative rub of her horse's nose. Martha, who had caught the echoes of the gallop through the bridle path of Villa Amette had hurried out from the house with a soft cape for her mistress's shoulders, but Joanna waved her away and turned in among the beds of gorgeous pansies and French violets which lined the walk on either side up to a glistening white summer house, a miniature of the Petite Trianon of Versailles. This spacious summer house, with its broad porches and crystal windows, was famous along

the Riviera in legends more or less romantic. When the grounds of Villa Amette were thrown open to some exotic revel the house in the "Amette Trianon" was the center of bizarre festivities. From its porches one might look along far stretches of the deep blue Mediterranean, and weave many idle fancies about the snake-like ships coming in from Suez or stealing along to Corsica.

Joanna dropped onto a step beneath a window, and, with her customary trick of pulling up her knees and resting her chin in them, fell into a profound study. She did not notice when her riding crop slid from her listless fingers, nor when Martha, who had been observing her, came across the lawns and stubbornly spread the cape, which was heavy enough to baffle the always cool sea breezes, around her slim shoulders.

Of what Teddy had said to her only one thing hurt a bit. The talk among that circle of butterflies and butterfly hunters which make up the gay colony of gamblers—gamblers in love of one kind or another as well as in money of the only kind—that credited her with deliberately "stealing" from Yvonne, one by one, that rich company of devotees whose constant hanging on about her had classified them as her own particular army of serviceable courtiers. It was true, of course. Brandon, for whom, she knew, Yvonne would have sold whatever soul she had; Roddy Kenilworth, who had once been much to Yvonne Coutant, and who, for some strange reason, might still command her when he chose to drop his mask and tear hers aside; Michael, the Russian, who had saved his fortune from

the debacle at St. Petersburg and had been generous with it to Yvonne's benefit; one or two others who fluttered around her in London and Paris and who counted in a lesser way, and even Teddy Dorminster himself—for there always had been, before, a sort of genuine affection between Teddy and Yvonne which Yvonne had called upon at those times when she was a little tired of everything. All of these had made a corral of her own treasure chest and had climbed into it, each with his separate manner, and separate intent.

Yet Yvonne had never revealed the slightest gesture of concern. Indeed, there were times when Joanna fancied that she gloried in the fickleness of her satellites. It was almost as if deliberately she invited it. And, then, there were other times, Joanna reflected, when she had surprised the weariness in the dense black eyes of the woman who had been, from her perspective, the ideal pattern in the minds of "Miss 27" and her excessively modern kind.

Joanna had become so accustomed to riddles that she wouldn't fight them too long when they persisted. A quick, nervous shrug of her shoulders was the sign that whichever way things went they'd get to where they were going anyway. She reached for her riding crop which lay at her feet. While she was clasping it she was conscious of voices that floated out from the rose-hung windows just above her.

She would have called out merrily, for one of the voices was that of Yvonne, but one word pierced her brain as sharply as a sudden shock, Yvonne was saying—John! Her mind just escaping from the thrall

of her reverie, it was caught and held again. Joanna was totally unconscious for a time, that she was listening. Yvonne was saying:

"I don't imagine his coming will make much of a difference. If he told her of this visit, or if she knew of it, she has not mentioned it. I doubt if she knows. It isn't a thing she would be secretive about."

The other voice was Brandon's: "Nevertheless, he will have to be reckoned with. She hasn't seen him since she left America, and the situation is changed now. John Wilmore isn't the fumbling pauper student he was a year ago. He's aroused the popular enthusiasm. He is sufficient of a celebrity to be acclaimed in Europe.

"The homage people are paying him probably has ironed out some of the kinks in that contorted philosophy which irritated her when she wanted to find out how fast a pace she could go. He'll probably measure up fairly decently now."

Joanna felt the touch of irony in Yvonne's reply: "You'll hardly be afraid that he will measure up to you! Roddy is frankly worried about him. That I can understand because when Roddy goes on an emotional spree, he scents a battle in every lone scout that gives his quarry a chance inspection. But usually you are confident. And, if I'm not mistaken, you hold the whip, there, and can swing it, whenever you are ready."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Only my careful deductions, my dear. I know you too well not to have my conclusions over every move you make. You're been so deliberate in your play that

I know you can afford to take your time. That, to me, means you're holding a trump. I won't ask you if I'm right, for of course you wouldn't tell me—the truth, anyway."

He answered something but Joanna had conquered herself and shut the voices away from her. She recovered her crop, rose quietly, and went toward the house.

CHAPTER IV

OLD MEMORIES

IN the house Joanna called her butler and inquired if any message, a telegram or cablegram, had arrived for her. The servant assured Mademoiselle none had. If John was coming or, as she understood from the conversation she had overheard, he was already in the South of France, he had sent her no word.

She knew he was in London. He had written from there, his usual letter, glowing with the details of his reception by British architects, telling of some of his plans, and restrainedly affectionate. He had said he would "run down" to the Mediterranean soon, but had mentioned no time. She made sure of this by hunting out his letter and reading it again.

She heard Yvonne come in from the grounds and found a reason for seeking her. They had not been together since the closing hour of the affair at Prince Michael's the night before. They had returned to Villa Amette in different parties and Joanna had retired at once.

Yvonne seemed to nourish no memory of what must have been her chagrin when the whisper went around at Michael's that the Golden Girl had stolen the Prince away to a rendezvous that required less possibility

of intrusion than that afforded by many palm-hung nooks on his own estate. She talked of some of the details of the night before, and didn't mention that she knew of John's coming or arrival.

"Roddy turned up this morning after you had gone," she remarked, "and was in a fearful fret. I gave him what consolation I could, which didn't satisfy him. I suggested he join us for tea at the Hermitage. I am supposed to drop in there on Michael. You will come along?"

Joanna agreed enthusiastically. "I must make some amends to Roddy," she observed. She didn't add that she was glad of the opportunity to settle the gossip over her and Michael by being seen, casually, with him and Yvonne. She wanted to disabuse any notion that she had time for an affair with this Russian whose emotional amusements were never romantic. She preferred that he remain classified as belonging to the other woman.

When they crossed the lounge into the palm room, at the Hermitage, the smartly gowned women and debonair, idle men who gather from all parts of the world for this fashionable tea hour, exchanged furtive and curious glances. The two men were the most discussed of Riviera habitués, and the woman and the girl were the season's brightest ornaments. For several weeks there had been rumors of some forthcoming event at Villa Amette. The Golden Girl, so the gossip ran, had wearied of such stereotyped thrills as spectacular plays at the roulette tables in the Casino, commonplace revels as were on the daily calendar among the Cap

Martin villas—Michael's, for example. With her apparently endless supply of money and Yvonne's customary disregard of convention to support her, the news was, Mademoiselle Joanna was about to give the Riviera something actually worth while talking about. These echoes were vague, indefinite; but, it was observed, workmen already were mysteriously engaged on parts of the Villa Amette grounds.

"I have been approached so far today by an exact dozen of people," Roddy remarked, when they had settled to their tea, "with a request for inside information as to what's coming off at Amette. Monte Carlo is getting uneasy."

"And you've told them what they expect to hear, haven't you," Joanna asked, lightly, "that it's to be just another wild extravagance of the American child?"

"I've told them nothing," he returned. "It will be time enough when I am entrusted with a few invitations to extend. I may have some of my friends, may I not?"

"Yvonne is really the hostess, you know," Joanna informed him. "I'm only helping to pay the bills. I haven't spent anything for an age, now, it seems. I must have a real fling."

It was then Prince Michael cut in and set Joanna's pulses to racing.

"I am reminded," he remarked. "Haven't I heard that Mademoiselle counted among her acquaintances at home this architect chap who is causing such a commotion just now? Wilmore, John Wilmore, I think it is. Sufficient importance for our esteemed journals

to announce his arrival at Monte Carlo. Extraordinary compliment, what with so many dukes and their duchesses, right- and left-handed, arriving daily. Am I right, Mademoiselle? Have I heard his name and yours, together?"

Joanna answered quietly: "It is possible. You hear so many names linked, down here." She smiled at him quizzically.

He laughed pleasantly. Prince Michael was always pleasant, this Russian who had found nothing in his thirty-five years to make him otherwise except on such fleeting occasions as when outwitted in some amorous adventure. It was a pleasantness, though, that impressed as a mask. The night before Joanna had known quite well there would have been no attempt at wedding formalities if she had found herself in Genoa with him.

"What else would you have?" he wanted to know. "We have no wars to fight and no work to do. There is nothing left but pastime. People used to write poems and read Shakespeare. Rotten time they had of it! Today we invent pleasures to be built out of our senses. That's more reasonable and it involves a learned knowledge of who belongs to who and what's the chances of taking her away from him. But we were talking of this architect fellow. Tell me about him, please. Seems to enjoy working at something."

"You'll have to satisfy my own curiosity first," Joanna declared.

"Perhaps you'll send for the 'esteemed journal.' I'd

like to know what is being said of him. He was a very struggling student when I saw him last."

An attendant quickly produced a copy of L'Echo which bore that morning's date. Michael pointed to a paragraph in the column of the new arrivals at the various resorts along the fashionable coast. Both Kenilworth and Yvonne watched her furtively, when, with a murmured "Pardon!" she fastened her eyes on the short item.

"Among the bookings on the Blue Express at Calais yesterday, was the distinguished young American architect, John Wilmore, who comes from a visit to London for an indefinite stay. He has made reservations at the Las Palmiers. Mr. Wilmore's recent achievement of fame has been extremely interesting. It is understood that a year or so ago he was unknown. American capitalists suddenly appreciated the great merits of his daring conception of a war memorial including some startling conventional features which have caused international discussion among artists and scholars generally. It is believed his work will be a valuable contribution not only to America but to society and the world at large."

The paragraph explained how the others knew that John was coming; that he had arrived, for the Express came in with the morning. But it did not explain why he had not notified her. Something about it all quivered at her lips, briefly.

"Extraordinary," Kenilworth remarked when she put the paper aside, "how a chap with nothing but a dream can stumble suddenly upon recognition and success. We all remember Wilmore in New York. If I

recall, Miss Manners took occasion to be provoked with him."

"Then it was more than an acquaintance!" Prince Michael declared. "One is never provoked with an acquaintance. We won't intrude upon that aspect, Mademoiselle," he added, to Joanna. "As you will probably present him, I'd like to know how he got on so well."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you much more than people generally know," she replied. "It came about after I left America with Yvonne. I ran away, you know, because no one I knew there had any confidence in me."

Prince Michael detected a seriousness as of some repressed plaint, and thought it needed observance. He sought her hand, and would have put his over it, oblivious to the others at the table. Joanna brought her hand away, quietly. She went on:

"Before then we had been quite good friends. I remember he had some plan for a memorial, something he wanted some day to build. I was never interested, much, because it wasn't anything I could understand, or wanted to. I remember, though, he objected to its being called a 'war' memorial. It was to be something commemorating soldiers themselves. All kinds of soldiers, I think—not only our own, but of other countries as well. Somehow he's made it known about, I suppose. Now when you have a mind to talk to him about it, you will know almost as much as I do."

"Morbid idea," the Prince observed, "I can't imagine anything I'd run away from quicker than a reminder

of that sort. Sentimental though. I suppose they'll always be doing things of the kind."

"The striking feature of his conception," Yvonne remarked, "seems to be his offering of a woman, a young woman, as the feature inspiration of all soldiers and putting her, instead of the customary fighting figure, on his highest pedestal. Others have given tribute to the fighter himself. He proposes a monumental structure which shall draw attention to what soldiers fight for." Of Joanna she asked: "Isn't that the idea?"

"Yes," Joanna agreed. "That wasn't his original plan, but he seems to have adopted it. It's what has caught on. I've read that he contends it is always a girl soldiers fight for. They've always left a girl of some kind at home, one like me, perhaps, or the one they're married to or—at least a mother. And mothers and wives were girls in their day. John has explained that he doesn't think girls change like fashions do. To soldiers who leave them to go to fight for them they have always been quite the same, reliable and worth while. It's a quaint sort of an idea, but I suppose it must be a good one."

Yvonne had shot a sudden glance at Joanna, and kept her eyes on her, intently, until she finished.

"If I remember correctly," she observed, "he did not always have the opinion that women don't change."

Joanna nodded at her. "Yes, I've been wondering if he's altered his theories, or just altered his scheme to make it pay."

"At any rate," Kenilworth remarked, "he is in a

fair way to see his project materialize. It's becoming internationalized and there is talk already of duplicating the idea in other countries. This generation will go any length to draw a lesson or an undisturbing memory out of the last upheaval."

Yvonne decided they had given enough of the tea hour to the merits of John's bid for popular fame. She had observed that Kenilworth, while he gave his part to the discussion, was uneasy. He had studied Joanna's face constantly, and watched every changing light in her eyes and line about her lips. She proposed a turn about the Casino rooms. "We shall have time for an hour of play in trente et quarante hall."

Prince Michael appropriated her at once, much to Joanna's satisfaction, and led the way along the avenue of poplars through the Casino garden to the white terrace.

Kenilworth, lagging behind with Joanna, went directly to the subject that concerned him deeply. "You are not going to let his turning up interfere with things, are you?" he asked.

"So far as I can remember," she returned, "he has never interfered, much, with me. Used to want to, of course, but couldn't, then. I could hardly fancy him being much of an influence now."

"Have you, then, completely wiped him out? As you seemed to imply that night when you invited me to join you in a kiss?"

She laughed. "That was so many ages ago, Roddy! I'd lost track of that one."

"That is evading the question," he rebuked her.

"John wouldn't have me then," she said, simply, "when I thought he was the one thing in all the world I wanted to buy with my money. I doubt if he'd want me at all now. He's famous, you see, and well on the road to prosperity. He won't need to take chances. I'm not as good a bet for him as I was then. Am I, Roddy?" She was daring him with her smile. There was no wistfulness in it at all, just frank, open provocation.

"Do you know," he exclaimed, irritably, "you are the most unfathomable creature within my experience?"

She was silent until they came up to the terrace steps. She answered him then as if there had been no lapse of time. "No, I'm not. I was thoroughly fathomed this morning. A man told me he wanted me however and whatever I am. If I could say just what I'd like to say about that, I'd say that would be a damn safe bargain for a man to make with any girl. But I can't say that, of course, for I must be a hypocrite and let on that I never swear."

CHAPTER V

A PLAYER AT THE TABLES

KENILWORTH would have guided his companion around the big Casino building to the pigeon field which lies between it and the sea, but Joanna preferred to go on to the white terrace and into the gambling rooms.

In Roddy's manner there was every sign of the truth of Yvonne's observation in the Trianon summer house at Amette; that he was worried by the reappearance of John in the girl's scheme of things. Secretly she was disturbed by him. During the months in New York, before her departure for London and France, he had been a supercilious admirer, graceful in his devotions, impressing her as a man of the world who had decided to affect enthusiasm over a new toy. Then, suddenly, his attitude and his purpose had altered.

He had deliberately followed her and Yvonne to London. It was then that circle of men and women which revolved about men of his kind, young men who are old enough to be discreet and rich enough to be idle, began to take stock of the seriousness of Roddy Kenilworth in his suit of the young American millionairess, Joanna Manners. There was a great deal of boudoir grief over this state of affairs, for Kenilworth was

known as one who went from one affair to another at slight provocation, but always magnificently—generously. It was felt that if he were definitely lost to his world of sub rosa romance it would be disastrous.

It was generally wished that the young American, whose fresh youth had proved an irresistible charm, where charm is translated in terms of flesh, would succumb to the inevitable—or, to Roddy's determinations, and in the usual course, free him for his next feminine engagement. "For," said one young woman to her dancing partner at the fashionable Embassy Club, "Roddy looks as though he were going to be serious, this time. He hasn't had a serious affair since the early days of Yvonne Coutant. He won't be a free agent until he gets over this attack, and the American is delaying matters."

Joanna liked Roddy Kenilworth. She had heard, as people do hear, that Yvonne had been of his making. How much to believe and what to discount she didn't know, nor care. She gloried in her ability, she who had come out from behind the silk counter, to bring the green tints into his eyes whenever she was of the whim to make him take note of her. She knew Roddy was in a continual fight with himself over her. Dorminster was always her slave. Brandon served her whenever she asked, but he remained aloof; she couldn't sway him—or, rather, she wouldn't dare. But Roddy made an occasional effort to baffle the spell of her, and to thwart him was like grape-quaffing champagne.

But, just now, with Prince Michael's sudden sur-

render to her creating a new undertone, and with the coming of John to irritate him, she was restless beneath Kenilworth's intent appraisals. And she didn't want to be cross-examined about John. She hoped she was concealing from Roddy the constant searching of her eyes along the vistas of the Terrace and into the Casino Square which fronts the crowded tables of the Café de Paris, for a familiar figure.

In the Atrium, the red-and-gold hung foyer of the Casino, Yvonne and Michael were awaiting them.

"The rooms are crowded," Yvonne observed. "I've decided to hunt a place at the roulette tables."

Around each of the tables were crowds four or five deep—the late afternoon company of curious visitors to the world's gayest shrine of sin, tourists, cocottes seeking monsieurs for the evening, and old women hangers on holding chairs with the hope of selling them to after-dinner habitués. All of these last, the old women of the gambling rooms, knew each one of the party that crossed the wide, polished floor of the splendidly decorated rooms and glanced about for places. Croupiers, too, gave little signs to each other at the entrance of the sleek Yvonne and the lovely young American. Both had been the heroines of sensational plays that had become Casino legends. Yvonne dropped into a chair Michael bought from an old hag for a fifty-franc note. Kenilworth guided Joanna to another and won a curtsy from the ancient dame who surrendered it by the size of his tip. Joanna plunged immediately into her play, Kenilworth standing close behind her.

When Joanna gambled she lost herself entirely. The color came into her cheeks as the *rouge et noir* divided its favors.

Others played with gold louis, or ten-franc notes, counting their plaques nervously after each turn of the wheel. Joanna tossed thousand-franc notes onto her colors or numbers or columns with feverish excitement. When she lost, and the croupier's wooden rake drew her stake away from her, she made pretty grimaces. When she won, and the rake pushed toward her fingers its pile of gold and silver and notes, she clapped her hands and turned to smile up at the man who stood over her. On this afternoon she made her first plays listlessly, as if her enthusiasm had been left with the hats of the men in the Atrium; but after one or two winnings she had forgotten everything, seemingly, but the cry of the croupiers and the spinning of the wheel.

Brandon, strolling through the Rooms as was his daily afternoon custom, came upon them. He pushed his way among the spectators who always gathered about the Golden Girl when she was playing, and stood with Kenilworth. Joanna, conscious of his presence, lifted her ungloved fingers over her shoulder for him to touch them. Kenilworth observed to the newcomer: "She's in a reckless mood. But she's winning!"

As a rule the Casino Rooms clear with the first pallor of twilight. Only the inveterate gamblers remain through the quiet hours when tourists risk their ten-franc notes and the members of the fashionable company disappear for dressing and their more interesting dinner rendezvous. Yvonne could keep a crowd

about her, however, and so could Joanna. Three times in succession Joanna lost the maximum, fifteen thousand francs. Then she won a sweep of the columns twice. By now she was playing only the limit—fifteen thousand francs at each play. And at her shoulder, at her insistence, Roddy reached down at every play to touch with his fingers an added risk of six thousand francs which theoretically registered him as a player and the extra maximum as his own gamble. By this subterfuge the Golden Girl was avoiding the rules and staking, on every turn of the wheel, double the maximum. Brandon and Kenilworth exchanged glances. A *chef de partie,* the official who supervises each table for the Casino Administration quietly took a stand beside the croupier. Mademoiselle had won a quarter of a million francs in an hour of play, and seemed to be unwearied. The official gave a hidden sign. Attendants in the quiet uniform of the Casino silently rolled up a square box set upon wheels. Out of the box they lifted cases of money which they put in the receptacles at the croupier's hand. Once, in just such a mood as she evidenced now, Mademoiselle Joanna had broken the bank. When she played the double maximum for an hour and had a winning streak, the *chef de partie* provided early for emergency.

Prince Michael and Yvonne after a time of desultory playing left their chairs and moved over to stand with Brandon and Kenilworth behind the girl at the table. Joanna felt their presence and called over her shoulder to Michael:

"You've got lots of pockets. Please empty my lap

of money. My bag is filled and I can't take care of it all. And you can play with me as Roddy's doing."

It is so clearly against the rules for a player to go beyond the maximum play that the croupier, worried already by the obvious trick of Kenilworth's merely touching the second fifteen thousand francs in the girl's stakes, glanced sidewise at the *chef de partie* for his approval of this added evasion. Joanna caught the glance and treated the aged *chef de partie* with a warm smile that captivated him. He bowed to the croupier and Prince Michael, having emptied the pile of notes and gold which Joanna had scraped into her lap into his various pockets and overflowing it into Kenilworth's, reached over her other shoulder to help make her play forty-five thousand francs at a time.

Yvonne, now edged against Brandon, suddenly felt his hand on her arm. When she looked up he signaled, with a look, a presence in the room. She turned and glanced about among the marble pillars along the corridors. She saw a figure already in dinner clothes standing idly between the columns where visitors loiter to take in the always-thrilling scene about the roulette tables. The boy, for he was hardly more than a boy, although he had the air of one who had grown big in the midst of something that counted, appeared to be undetermined whether to pass on, and out onto the Terrace, or turn into the Salle de Roulette and investigate the reason for the crowd that hovered, with dense faces, about the middle table. Yvonne, when she had taken in every detail of the figure in dinner clothes, glanced at Brandon. He nodded at her quietly.

She threaded her way out of the crush and crossed the chamber.

The young man between the columns had decided, evidently, to pass on. But as he was turning into the corridor his eyes caught the woman who was approaching him. He moved to meet her, a glad smile at his lips. Her two hands reached out to him, impulsively. Awkwardly he took them both, and would have dropped them but they held on to his.

"We knew you had come," Yvonne said, "and so I am to be the first to tell you we know what wonderful things you have been doing and how happy I—we are. You are quite the same John Wilmore we left in New York."

The "we" was emphasized. John noticed that. It confused him. And the woman still was holding his hands.

"I did hope," he said, "that you wouldn't say I looked just the same. Every acquaintance I meet says that to me. I feel as if I was derelict in something; as if I ought to look different than I do."

"Now that's a very appropriate speech," Yvonne assured him. "It strikes home, because, frankly, I've been wondering since I read of your arrival just how you'd look. Being famous does change some people, you know."

He fumbled a little with his released hands. Yvonne sensed the question at his lips. "She is over there," she said, "playing. That crowd is hers. She came in an hour ago quite normal, but the Red and Black always sweeps her out of herself. She's playing the

maximum treble, and winning. We mustn't disturb her now."

They walked across the salle and up to the edge of the crowd that pressed against the girl in the gold chair who still played, win or lose three times the maximum, and whose plays still troubled the *chef de partie* because she continued to win. Brandon came out of the pack and greeted John affably.

"I didn't think the newspapers would announce me," John said, shyly. "I wanted to surprise her. I had not told her when I was coming."

They moved in among the spectators slowly, Yvonne remaining close to his side. Brandon edged in between Kenilworth and Michael and, almost without a word, communicated to both of them that "he" was behind them. Kenilworth did not turn around. Prince Michael swung around quickly and gave the man who stood with Yvonne a deliberate scrutiny. Apparently he was satisfied with his observation, for he coolly turned his back and continued his fictitious play with Joanna's money.

Twice Joanna played *en plein*, or the sweep of the colors and columns. She had won that sensational play three times. Now she lost each time, emptying her bag of its hoarded gold and notes. Any experienced player would have switched, as she knew, to the simple colors, with the next plays, until "luck" changed. But a sudden stubbornness overwhelmed her. *"En plein,"* she called again, and swept forty-five thousand francs ($5,000 at the exchange rate of the time) onto the table. Again she lost. Whispering in the crowd be-

hind her ceased. Necks craned to see her next play. *"En plein!"* she called, and tossed another five thousand dollars onto the green cloth.

The crowd of watchers at the table gasped. Deathly silence fell. Even Yvonne, who had been chattering feverishly with John, was silent. Kenilworth started to murmur a caution, but Joanna threw up her hand jerkily and willfully. If ever *en plein* wins immediately after losing it becomes one of the legends of Monte Carlo. It turns up once out of four hundred plays, according to the average struck after many years. Again the croupier raked in the stake and called for the next play, *"Faites vos jeux, Mademoiselle!"* Make your game, Mademoiselle.

Her bag was empty. She signed over her shoulder to Michael for her money from his pockets. Again five thousand, and again! The watchful *chef de partie* went away. At last, with a shrug of her shoulders the Golden Girl leaned back in her chair. She smiled up to the croupier:

"Merci, M'sieur!" she said, "that is all. I have no more!"

The croupier, as there was no one else playing, permitted himself the rare pleasure of an exchange with Mademoiselle Joanna:

"I am desolate that Mademoiselle should have been so unlucky."

She shook her head, still leaning back in her chair, and smiling at him queerly:

"Merci, M'sieur!" she said, "but I am not unhappy.

Unlucky at play, you know, lucky at love. I want to be very lucky today, *M'sieur*—at love."

She rose then, and looked up at Kenilworth and Michael, who were standing transfixed by the suddenness of the piling up of her tremendous losses. She put a hand on the sleeves of both of them and shared between them that persistent, quizzical smile. She was about to chaff them when her eyes found Yvonne and the man beside her. Both Kenilworth and Prince Michael felt, and each took a different lesson, from the sudden gripping of the fingers that had rested so fairy-like upon their arms.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN'S SUCCESS

JOHN, changed much, despite his dislike of being expected to be different, put Joanna's hands together and wrapped his own about them. Quite a few of the men who had been spectators to the Golden Girl's reckless plays, and had marveled anew at the abandon with which she tossed fortunes into the discard when she pitted a stubborn will against the implacable rules of chance, gave John a deeply speculative glance. Among the crowd about the roulette table there had been many women, smart women from Rome, and Madrid, and Paris, with a sprinkling of Americans who were distinguished by their shy wonder at the boldness with which the others flaunted their banner of sex. Some of these watched the girl who greeted the stranger so intently that their own stares seemed to transfix them. Yet she was merely silent, and very still; the quizzical smile the croupier had seen played again about the curve of her lips. The brown of her eyes was browner, more golden than usual. What the women saw was the willful, spendthrift, always startling young American whose whims and flirtations had aroused the Riviera, yielding, melting, swaying to a young man who had neither the grace nor place of any one of that bright

company of worshipers which habitually fluttered about her. The man spoke, at last:

"It's good to see you again, Jo!" he said. The brown in the girl's eyes went a shade darker. It was an almost imperceptible change. It could be, though, a forerunner of shadows that could make those eyes almost black at times. She withdrew her hands gently. It was as if she had been holding something that, she had suddenly discovered, wasn't there at all.

"I'm glad you found time to come down," she said quietly.

"I intended to surprise you," he said. "I was going to drop in and have you open a door and come into a room, or something like that, not expecting me, and I'd planned to say; 'Hello! You've got your good looks on, haven't you Jo?' or something like the old days. Didn't think they'd announce me and spoil it."

The haunting shadow remained beneath her lids. She made no reply, but turned to bring up Prince Michael for the introductions. Yvonne, who stood with Kenilworth, saw that John's glance repeatedly swept the room, the litter at the roulette table reminiscent of the recent scene, to return and rest on Joanna. And she saw, too, that Joanna, watching John furtively, was conscious of his inspection of the gambling rooms, the gambling company, and of her.

On the terrace, free from the ceaseless confusion in the gambling rooms, the party stood for a few moments, by common consent, against the white balustrade. Michael and Kenilworth plunged into their polite appreciations of the world-wide attention the young

architect had drawn to his plan for a unique and stupendous monument to men who went to war. Michael referred to "the late war." John launched instantly upon a correction of that understanding.

"Not alone the men who went to fight in the late war," he said, "but in all wars—those ahead of us as well as those behind us. They all were stirred by the same exhilaration, you know, and always will be. Your ancient crusader fought for a religion, but it was a woman, a girl, or one who was still a girl in his fancies, who gave him the courage to go, and sent with him the memories that cheered him. My structure is to commemorate the women who have made every soldier think he is not only a unit in a regiment but a knight with his lady's handkerchief waving from his helmet."

The two women, who had drawn together while the men questioned John, became restive after awhile. Joanna declared, "But we are not to stand here talking about soldiers and wars and things made out of stone. Mr. Wilmore will dine at Amette, I know. You, too, Roddy, if you will. I know Prince Michael has some glamorous engagement of his own for tonight."

Prince Michael bowed elaborately, and acknowledged that he was dining *tête-à-tête*. "Although it should be with someone else," he added, sending Joanna a meaning glance that was a reminder of the dash to the frontier the night before. Kenilworth would have accepted promptly the welcome to Amette, but Yvonne interfered.

"You can take me to the Metropole for dinner,"

she said to Roddy. "You will not have to change if the balcony will satisfy you, and it will me. I shall run out to Amette later to dress."

Joanna thanked her with her eyes. Kenilworth was inclined to be stubborn, but Yvonne managed the situation. Presently Joanna and John were speeding out the sea road, in her luxurious foreign car, toward Villa Amette. The lights of the early evening were twinkling in the bay, and the perfumes of orange and lemon and geranium were ushering in the mellow Riviera night.

Between the two in the car there was some subtle barrier. It had come with the shadow back in the *salle de roulette*. John was stiff; Joanna thoughtful. "You haven't congratulated me," he said, at last. She regarded him gravely from her corner of the wide cushioned seat.

"The wonder of it is overwhelming," she said. "My throat was crammed with the things I was going to say to you when we were alone. They've gone out of it. It has made me very happy, though, when I have read the splendid things people say of you. You are going to be a success, after all, aren't you? All your dreams are coming true."

He waited a while before he answered. "Not all of them, Jo. And there has been a nightmare among them, you know. It's never gone away."

"You mean me?" The challenge was so sudden, so relentless, that he started.

"But we mustn't go into that, now," he objected. "We've both turned out differently than either of us

expected. Let's just accept each other as we are, and be content."

"Oh, but we are not going to do that at all, John!" she exclaimed, suddenly gay. "We're not accepting each other. You're much too great and too serious and preoccupied for me. I'm much too frivolous for you. You've told me all of that before, and you'd made up your mind about me. I'm just downright glad to see you, because I shared those dreams of yours, you know, and I'm so glad to see you winning your way. You're out of the past, the silk-counter past, and I'm out of the past, the Mrs. Adams past. That's all it is, isn't it?"

"I had hoped it would turn out to be more," he said, shortly.

"That's the trouble with hopes," Joanna observed. "We build so much into them and it takes so little to blast them!"

In the long, low-ceiling dining room of Villa Amette, they sat across from each other over a table of exquisite napery and massive silver things. A butler and the serving maid stood silent, immobile between courses, at the end of the spacious room. It wasn't at all like the dingy, coffee-odored restaurant around the corner from John's workroom in New York, where they used to "save carfare," as she had called it, by doing the best they could for thirty cents apiece. "You must tell me all about it, now," Joanna prompted him, when the servants stepped back to their post. When he hesitated, she said: "You must begin at the beginning. Your letters have been so rambling. I don't know at

all what happened to bring you out of your workroom into fame. It is as mysterious to me as my own situation still is." He complied with the air of one who repeats an old story. He thought he had explained it all in his letters.

"I was called in one day, by Mr. Foreman—you remember him?—head of the firm I worked for. He swept me off my feet by asking if I had not some idea of a memorial, and he described to me just what you and I had talked over so much. We spent an hour over it. I think I got enthusiastic. He reminded me that several times I had spoken of it in the drafting rooms to the other boys. One of them, I suppose, had mentioned it to him. The firm always was interested in the ideas of its apprentices. And he had passed the thought on to someone who, he said, had become concerned. That's all there was to the start of it. Things just happened suddenly."

"They do, sometimes," Joanna remarked.

"Foreman took me to his house. Two or three of our great architects were there. I had my plans—those plans I used to show to you, Jo. The ones you said made your head dizzy. Then it happened! Someone who is close to Foreman put up the money for me to go ahead. It was promised me that all funds necessary would be found to make the idea materialize. Some societies were interested, contributions began to pile up. Discussion began. Money was made available for me to work out and build a huge model. I've almost finished that, now. Whatever I need in the way of help is available. When the model is finished,

I am assured, there is to be a world-wide competition among sculptors for the figure of the girl that will surmount the great dome. That's all. Foreman knows the backers. I don't."

"But the thought of the girl, John; that's an original idea, and new, wasn't it? And it's so splendid."

John was silent a moment. Joanna kept her gaze on his face. "That is an odd circumstance," he said, slowly. "During that first interview with Mr. Foreman, when he brought up my secret idea, he made the suggestion of symbolizing the romance behind the soldier with the figure of a young girl, representing the youth of all ages. He had worked out that thought himself, or it had been worked out for him. Strangely, too, it seemed to me you had said one time, when you did bother your head by listening to me, that every soldier you know of went away to fight with a girl's kiss on his lips. I remembered you said soldiers seemed to be satisfied with their girls, anyhow, if other people did distrust them. Foreman had the same idea. So I adopted it. It's caught."

After a time restraint settled between them again. They went into the moon-lit grounds for a turn among the gardens. They came upon a little patch of timber.

"I'm having a pavilion built," Joanna explained, "for the dancing at my fête. I'm having a party, you know," she volunteered, "early next month. Everyone expects something of the sort among the villas down here, and I'm going to do my best. It was Brandon's idea. He and Yvonne are supervising the details, I'm spending the money. We shall make it something to talk about."

"Yes," John murmured; "all that you do—do with the money that was given you, seems to make people talk. I've heard much. In London, in Paris, and even during the single day that I've been here. I asked the *concierge* at the hotel if he knew where the Villa Amette was. 'Oh,' he said, 'Where the Golden Girl lives? It's a gay place, M'sieur. Anyone will show you the way.'

"And, I fancy, you gave them something to talk about at the Casino this afternoon. You're having a bright time with your money, aren't you, Jo?"

"You mean to say, don't you, that I'm frivoling it away?"

"You don't seem to have accomplished much," he returned. "It's quite as I told you, in New York, isn't it?"

"Quite," she agreed, "I'm just a daughter of the Babylonians, John. A daughter of the Babylonian to-day. People say my motto is, Flirt, Lure, and Venture. I'm not the kind of girl, John, you'd put on your pedestal, am I?"

He wouldn't answer in words; yet Joanna understood that he did answer eloquently. And the shadows in her brown eyes were deeper. Yvonne recognized the depth of them when she returned, having left Kenilworth behind.

Both Yvonne and Joanna were promised at the Opera. Lady Weymouth, Teddy Dorminster's blithe sister, was entertaining in her box. One of the grand dukes, a Pasha from Constantinople, who was interesting because of the general speculation that peopled the chambers of his Bosphorus palace with a bevy of

languorous houris, and a demi mondaine from Paris who had married an American millionaire and was amusing by her efforts to acquire proprieties, were to be of the party. Lady Weymouth would have been desolate if the Golden Girl and the exotic Yvonne did not appear to complete the mixture of spice and fashion.

"As you will be possessed promptly by Teddy," Yvonne remarked to Joanna, "I shall take charge of Mr. Wilmore. If Brandon and Roddy turn up they must create their own devices."

When the two women came down from the esoteric mysteries of their boudoirs it was Yvonne who summoned John to join her in a cocktail before they entered the car that awaited to take them back to Monte Carlo. On the drive in from Amette it was Yvonne who talked with him, who dazzled him, led him into the subject always eager within him, his romantic project, and clothed it with the charm of her own sympathetic understanding. Joanna, silent, was almost forgotten until the car drew up at the Casino gardens. There, Dorminster appropriated her. Yvonne, allowing John to reach in his hand to help her from the car, put her fingers into it and allowed them to rest there until color came into his face.

CHAPTER VII

JEALOUSY

THE wide grounds of Villa Amette, reaching down the slope of Cap Martin to the sea, began to assume new perspectives of their transformations. The speculative group of workmen that had begun, two weeks before, to place their stakes, had now become a busy crew that numbered scores.

Pavilions, pergolas and stretches of polished dance floors bordered by great potted palms brought from Cannes were taking definite shape. Graceful columns, slender and carved into semblance to fairy spires rose in companies that, later, were to be hung with trailing green and hidden lights.

Joanna and Brandon strolled through the lawns on their customary daily inspection. Workmen touched their caps to the Golden Girl with their curiosities shining in their eyes. To them, she was of more interest than the preparations they were making for the fête of which the entire Riviera talked. For a one night's whim of this strange, restless girl, their hands erected an arbored bower to be covered, for this night, with choicest roses culled from the gardens of the Monegasques in the Condamine. The cost of the roses alone would equal far more than the year's pay of many workmen. Around a miniature lake a carpet of lemon

wood was being laid, and for the surface of the water, that would be pumped into the lake a canopied bark such as Cleopatra might have envied was being hewed from cedars. This cost, too, would have sent the children of a family to school for a year, freed a household from its fear of old-age poverty, dowered a daughter or erected a home for a son and his bride. But the bower would do its service for a night, provide nothing more, perhaps, than a fragrant screen for a stolen caress, and then, on the morrow, be contemptuously demolished.

The workmen at Villa Amette tried vainly each day to fit the stupendous folly into the fresh and lovely youth of the girl who walked among them each morning and thanked them prettily when they touched their caps for the progress they had made. Older ones among them, and those who were more thoughtful, glanced from the Golden Girl to Brandon, who walked with her. Sometimes their faces darkened and they muttered to themselves. For, after all, was it not Brandon, who urged them, with his ironic smile playing at his lips, to spare no expense? Was it not Brandon, rather than the Golden Girl?

Brandon and the girl stood on a knoll that the landscape gardeners had left on the hillside, and surveyed the scene that spread out before them. "Whatever celebrity has been withheld from you," Brandon observed, "will come to you after the echoes of this have reached from Nice to Genoa, and to Paris itself. Amette has provided some splendid gayeties in its history; you are promising to outshine them all."

Joanna did not reply. Brandon looked down at her. She stood close to him, and he saw that her glance was roving over the grounds mechanically. He noted that there was little of the accustomed light of eagerness in her face. Joanna had not laughed or smiled as much, or as often since John's arrival in the vicinity of Villa Amette. She had been gayer, if anything; more reckless, more persistent in her whimsical escapades. But Brandon, who studied her, sensed a shallowness in her merriments.

"It will be said of me," she murmured, at last, "that I will have earned indeed the name they have given me, Golden Girl, won't it?"

"No one doubts your right to that admiring designation," he assured her. "Yet, until now, you haven't been so careless of the fortune that was entrusted to you, as is generally believed. Isn't that right?"

She shot him a quick, almost startled glance, and then fell again to calmly examining the Amette vistas of groves and gardens peopled with noisy workmen. "You would not expect me ever to admit that I've been careless, would you?" she asked, quietly. "I have done as we planned I should, as you and Yvonne and I planned after Graydon and Mr. Eggleston refused to help me with their advice. I have bought whatever seemed good to buy. That is all."

"You have been spared big jewelers' bills, I must admit," Brandon remarked, dryly. "Kenilworth, Michael, Dorminster—even I, have gathered a great deal of happiness in finding for you the ornaments you like."

"And when," she asked, softly, but very clearly, "are you going to exact your toll—or demand it?"

She didn't look up at him, nor move. For an instant Brandon was uncertain as to whether she had mocked him, defied him, or merely teased him.

"That is an unpleasant sentiment," he said. "I, at least, of all your conquests, have asked nothing of you. I shall, of course, ask much, but not too much. And, I promise, I shall accept your gift, whatever it may be. You remember I promised that, a long time ago."

"And have bided your time. Why?"

"I have been waiting, more or less patiently, until you had found yourself. You see I preferred not to take unfair advantage of you. Others have, I believe."

Now she smiled up at him, but wistfully. "You must have had great patience, waiting!" she exclaimed. "It has been terribly hard for me to find—me! Hasn't it? And the worst of it is, I'm still hunting."

He waited for her to acknowledge his concluding words—that he would not, as he thought others had, take advantage of her. But she ignored that. Before he was ready to speak, she touched his arm and then waved her hand, like a princess bounding her domain, taking in the whole expanse of the Amette acres.

"Perhaps I'll find something here, when the lights are lit and the ropes hung, and the people have come. Or, perhaps, you will. Who knows?" Suddenly she was serious. "It will cost enough," she added, "at any rate. Yvonne and I went over the estimates this morning. Eggleston will be shocked when the bills

reach him. More than a hundred thousand dollars, I'm sure. You have made me be very extravagant, you know."

"Whatever you do, must be done well," he retorted. "Isn't that a befitting ambition? I have understood, you see, that you look upon your money as a means to excitement. You will have it, when your fête is in full swing, and the memory of it will be just as exhilarating. Why should one bother with costs?"

"Why, indeed?" she agreed, briefly.

They walked across to the Trianon summer house, skirted it, and came to the most pretentious of all the temporary structures being erected on the estate. Around an open space the slender columns of wood that had been especially made were being set so close as to form an almost unbroken wall, like the pillars closing in the nave in some great outdoor temple. The columns stood in two rows, forming a continuous pergola over a wide path that completely skirted the enclosure.

Inside the columns gardeners were busy grading the lawn so that it sloped gently, as a theater auditorium, to a broad stage that had been raised on short pillars, fixed like piles, into the ground. Over all the workmen were hanging a latticed canopy or trellis. For whatever entertainment was planned for the spacious stage, around which wings and curtain frames were being placed, fully three hundred spectators might sit comfortably between the pergola walks. For that many folding chairs were already piled under a canvas cover near by.

When they stood between the pillars and saw that this structure was further advanced than any of the other preparations, Brandon asked:

"You still insist upon keeping this part of your program a secret."

"Yes," she replied :"You shan't know anything about this, or what I'm going to do here, until you come in under the blossom-laden road and take your seats. I'm having great fun planning my little surprise."

"Am I forbidden to speculate?"

"You are not, but you will be unsuccessful. It's to be my idea of the climax. I've asked everyone I know to remember the most sensational things other tenants of Amette have done to make their fêtes remembered. I know about them all, from the feast presided over by the Indian rajah who presented his chosen lady the carpet of diamonds that was Nourmahal's nuptial rug, to the Moor who made a lake and had his servants suddenly throw all the women into it. I want to excel them both. There must be something startling by which to remember the Golden Girl's fête." She brushed his arm with her fingers.

"Mustn't there be?" she asked.

He would have made his speculations and sought some hint of the mystery which was to be revealed upon the open air stage, but he was suddenly conscious of a stiffening of the slender body that stood close to him. He followed Joanna's gaze and saw two figures crossing the terrace which faced the Trianon.

John, in flannels and blue, his strong, well set form bearing its new poise of easy confidence, stood for a

moment with Yvonne at the top of the terrace steps between two stone images. Yvonne was very youthful and beautiful in the orchid tones she affected for tennis and golf. The single golf stick John carried was evidence that they had come in from a round of holes over the little Amette fairway that stretched across the ravines and flat spaces of Cap Martin. Brandon saw that Yvonne looked often into the face of the man beside her; and that she rested her hand on his sleeve, and fluttered it about his wrist. And he saw, too, that Joanna watched, and that the marks of her teeth were redder than the flesh-red of her lips.

Brandon reached down and found Joanna's hand. He gave her fingers a gentle pressure. As if something startled it, her body relaxed. And as if she were announcing the conclusion of some very deep considerations, she said:

"I have decided to have the trellis roof that will be over the crowd when it gathers here for my little play made with mimosa blossoms. I must have them gathered. It will take a great many."

"Have you chosen them," Brandon asked softly, "because you like their heavy, intoxicating perfumes, or because they reveal so many colors, and in their form are snake-like?"

She waited a moment, and then said, irrelevantly it seemed: "The perfumes of mimosa either steal one's senses or lull them. They seem to match so many people."

They went toward the house, but stopped at a bench under a natural arbor that enclosed a tiny

garden. Brandon gently urged her onto the bench and sat beside her.

"I have been too close to you," he said, "to fear that you will be offended with me when I ask you to drop your barriers low enough for us to talk across them—of young Wilmore, and his fascination for Yvonne."

She stiffened immediately and attempted to rise. Brandon caught her and brought her down beside him again.

"I fancy she is only repaying me," she breathed, her glance probing the flowers at her feet. "It is said that I have stolen all her lovers, you know. I haven't tried to, but I suppose I have. You have all wanted me to take you from her, it seems. And I've wondered why. Now it is only fair that she should do the thing that, to her, must seem retaliation."

"It is retaliation, isn't it? She is taking from you the one you'd rather not lose?"

She turned her eyes full into his. There was much of bitterness in her tone, when she answered him, and much of earnestness, too.

"I am not at all sure of that. I don't think I am glad that John came down to the Riviera, but now that he has come, and I have seen him and he has seen me, again I am not very deeply concerned about him. You wanted to know just how I feel—that was your real question. Well, I haven't stayed awake a single hour because Yvonne has taken a fancy to John and he is making a silly fool of himself." She was silent for a time, while Brandon watched her quietly. Joanna

always added something to whatever she was serious about. As he expected it came, suddenly:

"He never did know very much about a girl. It will do him good to learn all that Yvonne can teach him."

CHAPTER VIII

LADY WEYMOUTH

A CAR, turning in at the Amette gate and rolling up the road to the veranda of the villa, reminded Joanna that Lady Weymouth, Teddy Dorminster's sister, had telephoned early in the morning that she would like to come out for a chat. "Something rather personal between you and me, my dear," she had said in her impulsive, staccato way. "You may give me a cup of tea, and a brandy and soda, and when we've had a chat show me over the grounds, if you will. I am all excited by what I hear of the preparations you are making for your big affair."

Brandon frowned when Joanna got up from the bench and insisted that she must go to the house to greet her visitor.

"But we were just beginning to get somewhere, weren't we?" he protested.

"Were we?" she asked, looking at him, coolly. "You were telling me that Yvonne is following the only honest path for a woman to take, that she is going straight to the goal of her desire. I believe you said that she must see some promise of novelty in stirring John's madness, and satisfaction in proving that she could go in where only an angel would be welcome. You had gone so far as to advise me that it was time

I drop my pretenses and take love as I find it. I didn't know you were particularly trying to get anywhere."

Brandon, who had remained on the bench when the girl stood, rose. If there were a mask to drop his fell for a fleeting moment. He caught Joanna's arm and swung her about until she stood close and looked up into his face. But when he spoke his voice was like the smoothness of the motor in her Daimler car. It purred. And it was insolent.

"I said all of that, and more," he murmured. "I said that you were a cheat; an impostor in the order you have chosen to enter. You are playing every night and day of your life with flame, and foolishly think you aren't being burned, but you are. The deadliest burning, you know, is the kiss of an invisible fire that goes deep before it pains. You are being scorched by the ridicule of those who know that you only pretend that you don't understand Kenilworth, Michael, and the others, and the contempt they have for one who tries to be discreet, but is only deceitful. We had got that far."

For an instant anger flamed in the gold brown eyes that looked up into his; she trembled, and the tangerine glow came into her cheeks. Then she was calm, again, and inscrutable.

"But what futile progress!" she mocked him. "You read me a lesson from a book I learned by heart, long ago—when I was '27' of the silks. It used to be, you know, that we needed to be told that if we were invited we would be expected to accept; that if we made ourselves into a welcome sign we might as well say 'come

in.' We've learned all that now. And we know when to say 'come in' and when to say 'go to the devil!' How much further did you think to go?"

He still spoke softly; still reminded her of the low hum of the motor in her car. "Far beyond all of that, my dear Joanna! Up to the very edge of all your make-believe." Suddenly his manner changed. He dropped the hand he had held with a tight, nerveless clasp. His smile came back to the corners of his mouth. He spoke airily. "But the moment has fled, hasn't it?" he exclaimed. "One must profess love and make its demands and propose its bargains when tempers are out of tune; should they?"

She regarded him from half closed lids before she spoke. Then she said:

"You are the cheat, you know. Because you hadn't said anything about love. You'd been trying to get wherever you were starting for with—that part of it. Next time, remember. Neither Roddy nor Michael were so clumsy as to forget."

And she turned away and left him.

Lady Weymouth, a sprightly, ecstatic young woman of that English sort which possesses two distinct characters, the one that shows and the one that is hidden, often as opposite as the poles, greeted Joanna effusively when the girl reached the villa verandas, where the visitor had chosen to wait. Joanna was fond of Teddy Dorminster's sister, but it was a shy fondness that she never quite revealed. Betty Weymouth was different, someway, from others of the crowd that flitted from villa to villa, that shone resplendent with its jewels

and its velvet backs at the Casino opera, or rode, in pairs, through the quiet lanes that wandered back from the main roads by the sea. She professed, openly, to be ever at the verge of indiscretion; but one was quietly confident that she never was. She was barely thirty, but repeatedly announced that she was in imminent danger of being arrested, or fined, or something like that, for having deliberately lopped off two years from her birth certificate. "One must knock off at least a year with every baby," she liked to declare, "and I've already got two." She was desperately unconscious of any attractiveness or worthwhileness upon the part of the earl, her brother, but often sat and talked with him for an hour at a time. Which is seldom the way between brothers of the Teddy Dorminster type and sisters of the Betty Weymouth kind. Joanna would have liked to have Lady Weymouth realize how fond she was of her, but was ever afraid Betty Weymouth would not take such appreciation seriously.

"I am all eagerness to know about your fête," the visitor said at once, "for that is all I hear whispered about. It's terribly exciting, you know, to be doing something, or about to do something, that is whispered about. I've been trying ever since I came down from London to get someone to drop their voices about me, but they won't. I put on a scandalous affair with Michael that night you were with us at the Opera, when you presented Mr. Wilmore, but have never heard an echo. You're so fortunate! The night be-

fore you took just a little dash in a car with him and whispers were so thick you could cut them."

"A whisper doesn't count for much, though, does it?" Joanna asked the ebullient Betty Weymouth. "It's rather like a cocktail without gin in it. When there's really anything to say folks talk it right out loud, as a rule."

"That's quaint!" Betty exclaimed. "Positively quaint. And so wise! I shall not be content, now, until people are talking out loud."

Joanna rang for the butler and ordered tea. "May we have it served inside?" Lady Weymouth asked. "Some place where Brandon, whom I saw just now with Yvonne and Mr. Wilmore over there on the lawn, or the others won't pop up to us? I've really something to say, you know."

While they waited for the maid to wheel up her tray and arrange the service, Joanna proffered Lady Weymouth a cigarette. For her own she found, on a table, an exquisite new holder that Kenilworth had sent her the night before. She had others set with emeralds or rubies. This one was of bamboo in which some Chinese workman had fixed tiny bits of camphor jade. "How gorgeous," Lady Betty cried. "Trust Roddy Kenilworth to search the ends of the earth to sate the whims of his lady loves."

She was instantly mindful of that slip of the plural —his lady loves. And, being an Englishwoman, she was never at a loss to turn her own slips into an advantage.

"I'm sorry I said that, my dear," she said gently.

"But it is just as well, perhaps, because it will open up my way. I want to talk to you about the kind of love that is spoken of in the plural." Joanna glanced at her sharply. This was a new Lady Weymouth.

"Or, it may be that it is love that isn't plural I will begin about," Lady Betty went on, after a moment's contemplation of the smoke that curled lazily from her lips. "It's about Teddy, you know. Teddy and you, dear. Teddy's an awful ass, I know, and he's kissed the hem of a thousand garments when he should have stopped at the fingers. But he's always said that no woman is ever approached by a man she doesn't beckon to, and I'm sure he ought to know."

Again she waited to watch the nebulous trail of the smoke wraith that lifted from her cigarette. Joanna's jade and bamboo holder was poised midway between her lips and the table. The brown eyes had become ivory black. Her lids were drawn close, until they shaped into two straight lines. "You mean," she said, "you want me to stop beckoning?"

Lady Betty was so startled that her cigarette slipped from her fingers to the floor. A maid appeared out of her forgotten proximity and recovered it. Lady Betty did not see the hand that held the retrieved tobacco.

"We mustn't make it a skirmish, my dear," she said to the girl who looked her full in the eyes. "I'm not come as a wife with a bargain to propose to her husband's mistress. I'm just Betty Weymouth dropped in to tea to ask her friend, the Golden Girl, if she won't be chummy and generous and let a good chap down—let him down easily, but let him down. He

loves you, dear, and he wants you. I've always said that there wasn't a reason in the world any man oughtn't to have any woman he wanted—if she'd let him have her. That's gone for my own brother, too. But he wants you for keeps. That's different, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's different," Joanna agreed. "Women are so free to be had, these days, that it's strange any man would want one—for keeps. And you think I'm not the kind he ought to have—in that way?"

Lady Betty smiled, and reached for a new cigarette. "My dear, you are so unexpected," she exclaimed brightly. "One plans a speech, or a sentiment, and you twist it into something that doesn't sound right at all and hurl it back before it's given." She was earnest again. "I mean only that it wouldn't be fair to me, to my brother, to our family, and least of all to you, dear girl, if you married Teddy. It would be hell for you, in fact. And, worse than everything else, it would be hell for him. I love my brother, Joanna. He's a good sort. Throw him over, won't you, like a good girl?"

"Really, you know, I've never taken him on," Joanna reminded Lady Betty, and then added: "But I might, most any time. As you say, he's a good sort. And I like him tremendously. He's asked me to marry him, you know, and that's made him fearfully interesting to me. You must tell me why——" She stopped. With her eyes she signaled the maid to serve the brandy and soda. Neither woman spoke while the ice was served and the mixture made. Then Joanna asked:

"Will you tell me why I am not worthy of your brother? He knows me. You don't. You and I are common birds of prey seeking the same game. You hunt in your way, I in mine. Your thrill may be different than mine, but we're women—or, at least, if you are a woman, I am a girl, which is the same thing. It may or it may not be, that I shall want Lord Teddy. Why not?"

"A Dorminster always has women," the other woman returned, "and he always puts them aside for a wife. The wife must be clean, and good. Are you both, my dear? You're modern, you know. You're beautiful and lovely, and, I think, honest. But you're all body. I'm all body, too, but I haven't the nerve that you have. You're not ashamed of it. A Dorminster must be ashamed of it. It's a Dorminster convention. Surely I won't have to say any more."

"No, you won't!" Joanna agreed. "Neither shall I. Teddy would rather have his final answer from me, than delivered through his sister, I know. And, I fancy, he'll know quite well what a Dorminster wants —and needs. Perhaps he'll get it. Perhaps not. Shall we walk through the grounds? I think you said you'd like to see something of the preparations I'm making. While we are about it I hope you'll choose the place for your seats in my pavilion theater. I'm staging a little play there that I know you'll love."

They spent an hour on the grounds. It was as if they had forgotten their time at the tea table. Lady Betty was ecstatic again, and enthused anew at each foretaste of the *en fête* thrills prophesied by each prepa-

ration made by the workmen on the Amette lawns. At the pillared pavilion she was sympathetic with the mystery Joanna spread about the plans which were to have their climax there.

"I shall have Teddy sit close to me to protect me from whatever this pagan temple shall unfold," she threatened.

"I shall want him to be very close to you," Joanna agreed. And Lady Betty looked at her quickly. There was something unwonted in the voice of the Golden Girl.

CHAPTER IX

MEMORIES AGAIN

IF the visit of Lady Weymouth left its impress upon Joanna, only Roddy Kenilworth and Teddy Dorminster sensed it. Neither of them knew of the appeal to the Golden Girl by the sister of one of them, but both, in their separate regard of her, were conscious of a subtle, but insistent change in her.

John might have realized it, too, but his was not a sensitive observation. And, as the days passed, Yvonne had drawn him closer and closer to herself alone. That Yvonne was deliberate, and merciless, in her fascination of the young architect whose name had so suddenly become known around the world, was apparent to all that gay circle which worships, like glittering dervishes of a Lucullan cult around the shrine where all is gold that glitters.

As Dorminster had repeated to her, as Kenilworth and Brandon had echoed, and as even Lady Weymouth might have said, those who watched were quick to recall it had been promised that when the brilliant, always dazzling Yvonne Coutant decided to strike back, there would be a crash. The crash, they predicted was on its way. And the ruins it would leave would be the Golden Girl.

If there had been restraints fixed by Joanna for her

bewildering revel, they seemed suddenly to vanish. Whatever walls she had built around her scruples tottered. So it seemed, and so those who watched concluded. Teddy Dorminster was frankly worried. Kenilworth, with the calmness of the older man, gave no sign of whatever might have been his reflections, but Joanna found him more constantly at her side.

There was some marveling at the persistence of the bond which held Yvonne and Joanna together. Between them there seemed to have arisen—nothing! As always they were inseparable, whether at the Casino, in the gambling rooms, at Prince Michael's, the Opera or at the fashionable gatherings among the villas. There had been a deep interest in the vaguely rumored romance between the young and wealthy American girl and the promising young architect whose dream in stone was coming true. It was believed by some that Joanna was surrendering him too quietly not to have a design in reserve. Others pointed merrily to Kenilworth, Brandon and Dorminster, and remarked that the field of her choice, and of her variations, was wide.

Perhaps Martha, who, at times, and in the secrecies of the blue and gold and pink boudoir, lapsed from the impassiveness that should hedge in a humble maid, and put her arms around the girl who slept in the big bed, might have added something to any discussion of her mistress. Particularly after that mistress had sat up in the bed, knees drawn up and chin resting on them, silent and almost pulseless, through all the hours after she came in until dawn. What Martha would have liked to have reported, as something however, that she

couldn't understand, was that when Joanna finally stretched out for a two hours' sleep, she remarked, apropos of nothing:

"There's a lot of things in the world that don't matter!"

John walked with her through the grounds when the workmen, with renewed feverish activities, were putting their finishing touches to the fairy-like structures. The night of the fête was close at hand. Here and there across the grounds miniature domes and spires were being gilded. Their shining surfaces caught the glints of the sun and mingled them with a purple haze that hung like a filmy, iridescent veil over the whole Mediterranean shore.

"It means something, that tint in the atmosphere," Joanna observed. "One of the Monegasques who live here the year round probably would make a prediction of some sort. Each one of them is a weather expert."

They would have spoken of the haze in the air to one of the natives, but in their absorption of the imposing details of the reshaping of the Amette grounds, they forgot the embryo mist. As was her custom of late Joanna acknowledged no intrusion between John and herself. After that first day, the day of his arrival, when her heart was ready to leap to his, but was repulsed, she had been whatever his current mood dictated that she should be. At times he put his arms around her, and drew her to him, and there were silences between them. At other times he was detached, moody. Today, Joanna knew, he was fighting with a serious hurt.

The first weeks of his visit had been a calendar of notable occasions for him. The Prince of Monaco, interested always in topics and proposals that are of human merit, had honored him with a command audience and had presented him to that distinguished group of scholars and scientists, and worthy men of other professions, who gather around him from many parts of the world. It is their tribute to the Prince who is dead, the father of the present ruler . . . of the little principality. These savants greeted the young American with enthusiasm. They complimented him upon the daring of his projected monument to the femininity of the inspiration for deeds of valor that soldiers perform on the battlefield. They were interested in the spectacular rise of the young student. He was asked to deliver an address, and did, with triumph to himself.

Just this day, Joanna knew, one of these commands into the coveted circle of men whose names were great, had been canceled; not abruptly, or offensively, but canceled, nevertheless. It could only be interpreted as a reminder that even a great purpose and a high ambition could not withstand a too flagrant violation of certain standards. John had become too much of a frequenter of the roulette rooms. And there was too great an interest generally in pointing him out as the new devotee of the beautiful Yvonne Coutant, and one who would be apt to sacrifice deeply at the altars of her sorceries. The distinguished young visitor from America had become one of the bevy of moths, even if

a brilliant one, and those who distribute honors are sometimes conservative.

The girl who walked through the Amette grounds with him would have liked to comfort him, but he would give her no opportunity. While they stood on the Trianon steps and watched the distribution of huge piles of blossoms, roses, rhododendrons and mimôsa, already being brought from their Monegasque gardens, Joanna remarked:

"You haven't complimented me upon all of this. Doesn't it remind you, somehow, of the evenings we spent planning the time when we would be able to build, together, a house that would have cost hardly more than my pavilion over there?"

It was not wistfully said, nor in reminiscent tone. She was standing apart from him, and spoke as if voicing a casual thought. A frown came to his forehead.

"Those are not good memories to have," he said. "This sort of thing gives them a sting."

She looked at him in open wonderment. If this wonderment was a mask, she concealed it skillfully.

"No memory has a sting, John," she returned. "That is, if they are the kind of memories that are worth while treasuring. The more we miss the things we once had, the more gracious is the recollection of them. I've put a little bit of that house we used to plan into every one of these things I've built here. Funny, isn't it?"

"The house, if I remember, was to last a lifetime.

This is to be the humor of a night. I can't understand what part of one could be built into the other."

"Love, John! Into the other you put what was your love—your idea of it. Into these things here I've put that love of yours, my dear, taken it from the home you would have built, and put it into this. It was you, you know, who said, just now, that the other was for a lifetime, and that this will be desolate and crumbled in the morning. At least, I expect nothing more—of this."

He was silent. She left him for a moment to give an order to the Amette gardener who supervised the sorting of the blossoms which were to shed their perfumes for a night and then wither. When she went back to him John said, with the blunt suddenness that echoed a determined resolve:

"There's something I must say to you, Jo, it's been trying to come out for days, now, and I know you've been expecting it. I've been rather a coward——"

"Rather a coward, John!"

It was said, quietly, softly, but there was something deadly in the manner of it. He flushed, but went stubbornly on:

"Yes, rather."

"It's to be about Yvonne, you know—Yvonne and me."

Again that quiet, soft interruption. "Tell me, John: are you going to marry me?"

This time she was looking at him. He could not evade those brown eyes that were darkened by the purple haze in the air, and whose customary fires

seemed to have cooled into a lazy smolder. While he shifted nervously, she drove in her challenge:

"Don't be a coward always, John. I love you. I love you as a girl seldom knows how to love. The marvel of my own money, and its mystery and the threat that is hidden in it somewhere, has never appalled me so much as your success and the grandeur of the thing you are succeeding in doing. That has made my love more of a woman's than a girl's someway, so it will stand much. Even your cowardice. Now you're being brave again, so go all the way in one leap. Never mind the stops in between. You've a fortune of your own in sight, so my money needn't count now. Shall you marry me?"

"No, Jo. You see, Yvonne has——!"

She stopped him instantly. "That's splendid!" It was quite as if she were complimenting him upon some triumph within his profession. She reached over and patted his hand and then pressed it for a moment in her own. "That's splendid," she repeated. "Now you're at least a coward no longer. You see I've got a funny mind, I think. I like to know things. It helps one make plans."

"But, Jo—there's much more to say. It isn't just like that— Shall I marry you? No. There's more."

"There really isn't," she declared. "You explained quite fully, without words, when you came down from London that matters were quite the same as ever. You'd got on but I hadn't. I was just the same jazz girl with the short skirts and a lot of knees and a good-time brain. Not the kind of a wife for the great

creator of a beautiful thing for future generations to marvel at. Why tell me all over again?"

He knew she was mocking him, and he realized that he was helpless. A thousand things hung on his lips. In her calm scrutiny of him they jumbled. She reached to him again and patted his sleeve. "We'll have a drink over it all, some day," she said. "Meanwhile I shall stop drinking all of my cocktails to you. Now go along into the house. You will find Yvonne in the reading room. I'm going to have one of Teddy Dorminster's horses saddled and ride over for tea with Roddy Kenilworth at his house."

She gave him her hand and smiled up at him. "You will not be seeing much of me now until the fête," she said. "It is so near and I have so much to do. But I shall want you to dance with me that night. By then we shall have both forgotten today."

She watched him until he disappeared beyond some shrubbery that cut off the view of the house. Then she turned toward the stables, but had not gone far when she stopped. She stood for a moment looking about her. When she saw that none of the workmen, or attendants was near, she crumpled onto the lawn, and lay, face buried in the grass, her shoulders shaking convulsively.

CHAPTER X

JOANNA'S DECISION

A STABLE groom fumbled with his cap when Joanna had chosen her horse and sent to the house for the riding togs into which she proposed to change in the stable dressing room. The man gazed dubiously down the Cap Martin slope and estimated the thickening blanket of violet haze.

"It'll be coming up fast, Mademoiselle, after a while," he said. "It's troublesome to ride through when it gets too heavy. I shouldn't advise Mademoiselle to go too far."

"Just along the sea road, to Mr. Kenilworth's," she informed him. "The lights there are never lost."

The groom would have liked to voice more insistent caution, but his mistress was abrupt with him. There were times when the servants at Villa Amette were afraid of their Mademoiselle Joanna. The groom shook his head but decided not to venture a further protest. He reflected that, after all, she was a good horsewoman and that a horse usually is dependable.

Kenilworth, whose villa nestled at the base of the hill, shut off from the majestic boulevard which skirts the shore by a dense hedge of semi-tropical bush, met her, with his own groom, at his gate. She stepped lightly from his hand to the ground and tossed her bridle

to the man. "Just an hour, please," she commanded.

Kenilworth immediately expressed dismay. "You haven't braved the mist to give me but an hour! It will take me quite that long to get accustomed to the vision of you among my things."

"Just an hour, Roddy," she insisted, nodding to the groom who accepted her order as final and led the horse away. "You see I've made plans for the evening, and I mustn't interfere with them. I shall have to get back to Amette and change."

It was the first time Joanna had granted Kenilworth a *tête-à-tête* hour "in the midst of his things," as he expressed it. She had always made a pretense of "being afraid" of him, to which, he customarily retorted, was flattering, but untrue. He assured her, at such times, that she was one who wouldn't be afraid of anybody. He had desperately proposed Lady Weymouth as a chaperone, but with no success. Joanna asserted that she'd never resort to a chaperone—"in these days." He was, then, puzzled by the sudden whim which brought her, uninvited and strangely vibrant. He knew her well enough to sense a purpose. Joanna, he had discovered long ago, usually concealed a purpose behind whatever was unexpected of her. He had made a profession, almost, of discovering those hidden purposes and fathoming them.

"Confess to me," she challenged him when she had settled in a great chair before the log fire which baffled the cool dampness of the increasing mist outside, "you are wondering why I came so unexpectedly."

"That I wouldn't do," he declared promptly. "If

you have any other reason than a sudden desire to enjoy my admirations without interruptions, I don't want to know it. I am jealous of my vanity."

"Then you shall be flattered," she returned gayly. "I am in the mood for you. Some day there's got to be a battle between us, between you and me, Roddy. Let's have it now."

He was on his feet in an instant and standing over her. She stopped him with her eyes, and held him half bent down to her. She did not stir, nor put up a hand; it was just the indescribable something in her eyes.

"No, not just now," she said, her lips shaping into the utmost of their provocativeness. "You mustn't be too literal. But tonight, perhaps, or tomorrow night—or when the moment arrives. But as soon as we can. I want to know how I'm coming off."

"Damn you! Are you playing with me?"

"No, Roddy. I've never played. Not since my money came. Some day I want to play. After we've had our battle, perhaps. What shall we do first? Let's go through the mist—to some place. Why not up La Turbie?"

"Tonight?"

"Tonight. That's what I must hurry home to change for. I shall want to look very alluring."

He straightened and looked down at her coolly for a moment. She did not flinch under his gaze, nor did her lips uncurve. He turned away and looked out of a window. It was already darkening outside, and the lights of Monte Carlo were vague pinpoints.

"If we drive carefully we can make it," he con-

cluded. "I'll take the wheel myself. You won't be afraid to trust yourself with me, will you?"

"That's what I want to find out, Roddy. So many people are skeptical of me, I want to know if they're right—or wrong."

He laughed. "I shan't ask you to stay beyond the hour," he declared. "I'll need some time alone to try to figure you out. What's happened? Something has, I am certain."

"Nothing," she assured him. "Nothing, that is, that wasn't expected."

A servant notified them that Mademoiselle's mount had been brought to the door before either of them realized that the hour had flown. She had induced Kenilworth to tell her some of the histories of the souvenirs which were strewn about the room in which their tea had been served, and she was enthusiastic about them.

When she went out to her horse she found that the groom also had brought a mount. Kenilworth nodded his approval. Joanna begged to be allowed to ride back to Amette alone, declaring her faith in the lights along the sea boulevard and her horse's instinct, but Kenilworth was firm.

"I should take you along myself," he explained, "but I shall want to look at the car. It's a stiff climb to La Turbie. I always want to be satisfied about my brakes."

At Villa Amette Joanna found Brandon awaiting her. "I have invited myself to dine," he explained, "and no one seems to object. Perhaps you will go

along for an hour or two at the Casino, afterwards. There won't be a crowd and we can drop in for an act at the theater. Yvonne seems to have other plans for the evening."

"And so have I," she told him. "I'm going up to La Turbie with Roddy. He's often wanted me to go up with him, and now I've promised."

"Sorry." She did not wait for the inevitable protest against climbing the narrow, winding road that ventured up the steep La Turbie mountain to the isolated resort above La Turbie village, but tripped on up the stairs. Brandon looked after her. Even women who were careless seldom went up La Turbie to dine or dance at the famous roadhouse atop the hill, unless in groups. The gayest of the hidden rendezvous along the coast, it was, in some respects, also the most forbidding. One always went up La Turbie, but one did not, customarily, talk about it. After he had stood for a time in deep reflection, Brandon went onto the Amette veranda and peered out into the damp fog. Accustomed as he was to the Riviera he estimated the feel of it to his nostrils and his fingers. He appeared to gain, from his conclusions, some definite satisfaction.

He summoned a servant and inquired if Mademoiselle Coutant was still occupied in her boudoir. The maid reported that her mistress was, and would not be down for some little time. "You may tell her," he ordered, "that I shall not be staying to dine, if she won't mind."

A half hour later, when he had dismissed the Amette car which had taken him back to Monte Carlo, Bran-

don summoned his valet and demanded that a suit of heavy tweeds be laid out for him. When the man had complied his master ordered:

"Go at once to the garage of the Italian in the Boulevard du Midi and ask for Antoine. If he is not at hand find out where he can be reached immediately. When you have him say that I want him to drive me as soon as he can be ready up the mountain. If he objects to the mist, tell him the thicker the fog the heavier his purse will be and there will be that much more for his men. Be sure, however, that it is Antoine himself you find. Otherwise return quickly."

On her way to her own boudoir Joanna stopped at Yvonne's. She, too, it seemed, was particularly painstaking at her evening toilette. Her maids were flushed and nervous under the temper of their mistress. That they were having difficulties in pleasing her was evident from the litter of glittering gowns angrily tossed into heaps on the chaise longue, chairs and even tables. For a brief instant Joanna stood in the boudoir door, beneath the curtains that shut off Yvonne's sitting room; just long enough for her eyes to harden and narrow. Then she announced brightly that she would be going out with Kenilworth and that she hoped her running away would not interfere with any plans for the evening Yvonne might have made. Yvonne glanced at her sharply. She concluded, however, that there had been nothing hidden in Joanna's tone. "I have no other plans than a run into the Casino, perhaps," she said. "Betty Weymouth is having something or other tonight at her place, and I did promise that you and

I would drop in, but that is not important. If you are running away by yourself I shan't trouble."

Joanna went over to the other woman and, stooping, lightly brushed her cheek with her lips. "Then I shan't be seeing you till tomorrow some time. It will be early, though, for I shan't be able to sleep with tomorrow night so close." She stopped again at the door as she went out, to say, as if it were an afterthought: "Tonight I'm going up La Turbie—with Roddy. It will be great fun on the mountain tonight."

Yvonne turned quickly, but the girl had dropped the curtains behind her. She waved both of her maids away, when they bore down upon her with Joanna's departure, and sat quietly in a study. Presently she looked up and into the mirror before her. She examined the reflection she saw there with an intent, abstract scrutiny.

From her face her gaze wandered to her throat, around which hung her most magnificent pearls, and then to her gown—she had chosen a thing of pink in orchid hues that had come that day from her Paris couturière's. She shook her head, in response to her mental conclusions upon the ensemble the mirror reflected.

"You may take off the pearls," she commanded of a maid, "and bring me diamonds. A lot of them. And I shall not wear this gown after all. It's too innocuous. I've something in burgundy; bring that." As if to herself she added, in a murmur that neither maid could overhear: "Burgundy and diamonds. If I'm not mistaken that will do the trick."

CHAPTER XI

THE CHALLENGE

TWO cars crept upwards along the tortuous road that climbed the mountain. Kenilworth's red roadster, with its master at the wheel and Joanna settled snugly beside him in the single seat, glided silently from the streets of Monte Carlo, into the shrub-lined avenue that narrowed gradually until it became barely more than a path sloping sharply toward the summit of the hill. Ahead of them Brandon, muffled in tweeds covered by a black domino, sat beside an evil, heavy-jowled Monegasque who steered a much larger car than Kenilworth's. The purple mist, hued vaguely now that the twilight had gone, blotted out the lights of town and villa which, on moonlight nights, make this road up La Turbie one of the beautiful drives of Europe.

"One who climbs the hill tonight, Master, must have a steady nerve and a purpose," said the Monegasque who guided the car in which Brandon rode.

"If the purpose is worthy of the nerve, the effort is worth while," Brandon returned. "One man's object is a woman, another's may be gold. I imagine your nerve would not fail you in either case."

When Antoine had made a turn with a sureness and a knowledge of the bank which stamped him as familiar with the road he followed, he observed:

"There are few women in your world, Master, for whom I'd take myself or my men into danger. Your women are playthings. That's why we don't let ours imitate them."

The lamps of Kenilworth's roadster suddenly revealed another car picking its way slowly just ahead. Almost at the same moment a disk of pale yellow light shone through the mist to be immediately wiped away by the gray mass of cloudlike atmosphere.

"What was that?" Joanna asked.

"The lighthouse at La Turbie village," he replied. "Queer necessity, isn't it? A lighthouse to warn travelers on a mountain road!"

While the dim radiance cast its sickly illumination over them Kenilworth examined the girl who sat so close beside him. He saw that her white throat, on which a single great red ruby hung, was glistening in the dampness against the contrast of her hair and the black of the gown she had chosen to wear. She had thrown back her head. Her wrap, of some plain, clinging stuff, softened at the collar with a ripple of chinchilla, lay open. Kenilworth felt for the bank with his front wheels and brought the roadster to a stop. He reached over and gently drew the wrap together, bundling its collar close about the girl's neck.

"It's a treacherous atmosphere," he admonished her. "One can never foretell its next day's consequences."

"Consequences are uncertain things to make into a prophecy, aren't they?" she asked. He studied her a moment, peering at her through the fog. He saw the vague shadows lurking in her eyes, shadows that came

and then evaporated as if they were fugitives of the mist that had reached a haven of brown depths.

"Are you wondering," he asked, "what is to be the outcome of—well, of your invitation to a battle between us tonight? If you are, it is useless. There will be one thing or another; joyful, glorious, restful, beautiful; or, so far as I am concerned, empty and, in that event, meaningless to you."

She was silent, motionless, for a time. Then: "How are we going about it, Roddy? You are to tell me that you love me, want me, and recite all those rituals of adoration for which you are distinguished. That much of course. I am to measure you and measure myself. That will be the obvious program. But there must be some new note. What shall it be?"

He guided the car back into the road, satisfied that the bigger car that had been ahead of them would have gone a safe distance beyond. "You are, in yourself, the one overwhelming new note," he declared then. "You and the whim of you to throw your colors at my feet and challenge me to fasten them to my shield—if I can. I've never experienced that before, from a woman. They've done it, of course, but they thought they were furtive about it."

"I don't believe in being furtive," she returned. "It used to be the fashion, and the custom, I know. But what's the use? Any woman always knows what another woman thinks. And every man knows what his brother wants. They pretty well know what they think about each other—every woman and every man. So much has gone wrong in the world, it seems to me,

because people have always tried to make a mystery and a game out of the plain and commonplace. It's more fun to be honest. If a girl builds a wall around herself she always leaves an opening that she can peek through. That's the breach through which a man may conquer her if she's weak. So why have the wall? I think it's better to stand out in the open—better for the girl, I mean. She can see what's coming at her, then, and be ready for it."

"So you have decided to put your arms down and tell me I may have whatever I can win? Just why, if it's not asking an advantage, have you chosen me?"

As was her way, at times, she considered this quietly. He waited, apparently intent upon keeping his car safely away from the ledge at the outer side of the road. At last she answered him:

"It's because you're straight, Roddy. Straight, according to your standards. You've never fooled me, nor concealed your desire of me since that night at Yvonne's, back in New York, when I asked you to wipe John's accusing kiss from my lips with a warmer one from yours. I knew enough then, thanks to what I've learned of men, to realize by the feel of your arms that you would be determined to hang me up, if you could, with your other trophies—as you would any woman who'd make herself interesting to you. And you've never tried to deceive me. You've even amused me, tremendously. Now I'm wondering if, after all, I haven't been deceiving myself."

She paused, but Kenilworth did not speak. He thought she would go on, and presently she did.

"John has done a big thing. When his opportunity came to him he went up, up like we are going now, through the mist, straight toward the end of a beautiful rainbow. He tells me I've been just a fizzle—and I suppose he's right. His pride and his triumph doesn't fit in with his loving me because, he says, I've wasted my time gilding the clouds with tinsel. Betty Weymouth is convinced I'm not worthy of Teddy Dorminster, who's not like you, Roddy, because he wants to marry me. And I suppose I'm not worthy of whoever it was who gave me my money, for he has never revealed himself. So it may be that I'm worth only the kind of thing you've been wanting to give me—the sort of thing you gave Yvonne.

"When I was '27 of the silks' I was what I thought it was smart to be—bold enough to let everybody know I was a girl, that I enjoyed being a girl, unashamed to take everything I dared accept out of girlhood. Perhaps short skirts and scarlet lips and too much knowledge of things as they really are does spoil a girl inside as much as some people say they do outside. Go ahead, Roddy, and find out—for me! I'll fight you like the devil, but I want to know if you and what you represent can win; if you do, John wins; Betty Weymouth wins; everybody wins!"

When she finished she put her hand against Kenilworth's coat. He felt it slipping into his coat pocket and resting there. When he would have spoken he realized that a long time had passed; that he had been holding himself stiffly, trying to absorb the feel of the

hand that snuggled in his pocket and determine whether it rested quietly, or trembled.

As the red car felt its way upwards the mist became less oppressive. Twice the lamps outlined the car ahead with a suddenness that would have unstrung the nerves of most motorists, but Kenilworth was a nerveless driver, and Joanna seemed oblivious to every danger. At times when the man beside her was particularly intent upon his wheel and his thoughts concentrated upon some bend in the road, she studied his face slyly.

They paused for a minute at the village of La Turbie. Across a gorge the lights in the windows of a villa were pinpricks of red fire where, on a clear night, there would have been a brilliant blaze. The atmosphere had become scented. Joanna wondered if the mist were not evaporating after all.

"Possibly," Kenilworth commented, "or still it may be rising from below. We'll know by midnight."

When they slid out of the village they passed the car that had been ahead of them. It had stopped before a crumbling hut at the edge of the little town, where the road began again its sharp upward twisting. Both Kenilworth and Joanna looked into it curiously. They saw that whoever had been at the wheel had left it—to go into the hut, probably.

The other figure was too muffled to be recognized.

They reached the plateau at the top of the mountain at last, and drew up before the clubhouse. Its cheerful light, glowing an unnatural red, made faint shadows in the open yard. Strains of mellow music floated

through closed doors, inviting newcomers to make the most of whatever sort of romance had brought them there.

"We'll leave the car near the road," Kenilworth announced. "We may have to make a dash for it if the mist becomes too thick."

Joanna slipped to the ground and stood close to the car. Kenilworth stood beside her while he drew off his overcoat, revealing his domino of shining white satin. It is a fiction at the mountain-top clubhouse that one must mask, so that all who go there may be assured of their anonymity—if they require it.

Joanna produced from a pocket of her wrap her soft black mask, a strip of thin velvet that barely reached the tip of her nose, with two almond-shaped slits for her eyes. Thin silver cords, to be concealed and fastened in her hair, dangled from either tip of the mask. She held up her face to Kenilworth in mute invitation for him to fix the taunting strip of velvet in its place before they should enter the house.

Her warm breath, escaping through partly opened lips, fanned him gently. She smiled up at him, half drowsily, as if the faint melodies of passion that came out from the dance floor had lulled her senses into a yielding tenderness.

Careless of the tang of damp cold she allowed her wrap to fall back and bare the throat that seemed to blend into the silver sheen of the ghostly moonlight. Twin lights of another car—they recognized it as the one they had left down the road—swung into the yard, the luster of the lamps flared suddenly bright and,

for an instant, enveloped them in the mist-dimmed glow.

Kenilworth's fingers lingered at their task of fixing the silver cord. His fingers quivered when the short, gold-brown strands of hair slid among them, Joanna moved closer to him, and rested her hand lightly on his arm. When he let his fingers relax that the night breeze might blow her hair about them, he stared down into her eyes and fancied that they had widened and that a circle of black had formed about the shimmering iris in each of them.

Then he caught her in a fevered clasp. She did not draw away, but reached up and drew down his head until she could frame his face with her two hands. Then she let him rest his lips on hers.

When he let her go because he dared hold her no longer, and because couples who had come out into the yard were stopping to glance curiously at them, Joanna laughed, the rippling laugh that might be irritating as well as musical, and said to him while he fixed his own mask:

"You see, Roddy, the wall's clear down. I'm in the open, and I'm fighting fair."

When they had disappeared across the clubhouse veranda and through the doors which had been opened to them by the red-coated attendant, one of the two men who had sat silently in their seats in the other car descended. To the one who remained at the wheel this one said:

"Back around between the red car and the gate, so

you can get out first if there's a rush for the road at any time."

"It is getting thick, and moist, Master," the one at the wheel grumbled, in the voice of Antoine. "In another two hours we won't be able to see the wheels and all there'll be between us and eternity, on the road down there, will be the brakes."

"Then your men will have less fear of being recognized, and so will you," the other retorted. "That pleases you, doesn't it?"

While Antoine muttered unintelligibly, Brandon threw his coat into the car and fixed his mask carefully.

He did not go at once into the house, but loitered on the veranda, smoking. When he had finished his cigarette he tapped on the door, and was admitted. The orchestra was playing a fox trot in languid rhythm, and the floor was thronged with couples whose moods the musicians knew so well how to interpret.

Brandon surveyed the dancers with searching glances. Then he looked among the tables. Suddenly his eyes found a slender figure in black, with gold brown hair, at a table half hidden behind the potted palms that shut off a corner of the balcony that overhung the dance floor. He appeared to be satisfied, then, and dropped into a place at an unreserved table, and order a liqueur.

CHAPTER XII

LA TURBIE

EVEN as Brandon watched the slim figure in black, from his table, the orchestra struck up a waltz, a slowly rhythmed, exotic melody that chanted like a song of passion. The figure in black rose. The man across from her whom Brandon had recognized easily despite his domino, as Kenilworth, was on his feet with her. A woman who had become careless breezed up to Brandon just then and boldly commanded him to take her onto the floor. He eyed her coolly and shook his head.

"I'd rather watch them," he said, and motioned to the vacant seat at his table in invitation to the unknown to sit out the number with him. The unknown declined. "I want to waltz," she said. "Anyone will do —if not you, a more gallant knight will humor me. It's the only time I ever think—when I'm waltzing."

"An odd condition, that!" Brandon taunted her.

"Sounds so, doesn't it," she returned. "But it isn't, you know. Women think they waltz; all women do. It reminds them of foolish dreams they had when they were very young." With a flirt of her hand across his shoulders the unknown disappeared. A moment later he saw her, among the dancers, and saw that she was dancing silently. And he saw, too, that Joanna, a strik-

ing figure in the colorful maze, danced silently; as if she, too, were thinking. He saw, too, that Kenilworth was holding her tightly.

When the music died in a plaintive bar, the dancers stood, expectant of the customary encore. The lights, which had been dimned, flared, however, and a roll of the orchestra drums announced an unwonted interruption. From the balcony railing a voice called, "Monsieurs et Mesdames!" All who were in the room glanced up, curiously, at the clubhouse host, who stood at the rail, leaning forward over the dance floor.

"I am desolate, my friends," the functionary called out, "before the necessity I must urge upon you all. I must ask you sorrowfully to make your departures from my hospitalities as soon as may be convenient for you. The mist, of which you must have taken note as you so kindly came up to our clubhouse earlier in the evening, has risen fast and densely. Soon your car lamps will be of no use to you. Even now you must go down very carefully. If there be any of you whose humor it is to remain with us until daylight, when the sun will chase the fog away, I assure you of my welcome. Those of you who feel it your duty to descend before the night has passed, must go at once —and very, very cautiously. In a little while it will be too late."

There was an instant babel of voices, and the rustle of those who, for their various reasons, must attempt the descent rather than remain at La Turbie during the night. Brandon, who had risen from his table, watched Joanna and Kenilworth. He saw that both of them

turned immediately toward the foyer where Joanna had left her wrap. Then he slipped out the door and went to the big car in which Antoine waited.

"As I expected," he said to the Monegasque, "she will not remain. Be ready to pull out when they approach their car. We want not more than two or three cars between us."

When Kenilworth and Joanna came out, many of the cars in the yard had already vanished in the fog, their horns echoing up from the road monotonously. An attendant was ordering departures, insisting upon an interval of two minutes between them. Brandon waited until Joanna, her wrap held close about her, her mask in her hand now, had climbed into the seat beside Kenilworth. Then he touched Antoine's arm, and, at the next signal from the starter, the big car slid away.

In the smaller car Kenilworth remarked, grimly; "It'll be a test of nerve, but we'll make it if anyone does." The girl seemed to detect a note of dejection in his tone. She slipped her hand under his arm.

"I'm sorry, Roddy," she said. "You were wonderful, and I am conceited enough to think you meant all that you said. But you just didn't sweep me off my feet as I thought you might. I suppose there must be something old-fashioned about me after all. Your arms are awfully comforting, my dear, but I couldn't have the feeling that the thorns would just have to grow on them. I know you think I've treated you rotten, but I couldn't help it. I feel better, for it, too. I'm sure of myself, anyway."

"I don't know," he said, "but that you've got the right idea at that. Better than mine. I almost asked you to marry me, and that's wholly against my principles."

"I'm glad you didn't," she returned. "I'm afraid I might have given in to that."

The starter appeared at their running board and asked them to proceed. They crept, noiselessly, out of the parking yard. Until they came to the first turn, some sixty yards away, the flickering lights from the clubhouse aided them. Then, when they had swerved sharply to the left they were wrapped in wet, almost impenetrable obscurity. Ahead they could see only the faint glimmer of their own headlights.

Twice they bumped into cars stalled at the inner side of the road. Each time they were called out by members of a party going back afoot—even women in fragile slippers and delicate gowns already soggy from the damp—rather than fight the descent any longer.

The red car nosing downward at a snail's pace, struck a stump. "It was foolish of me to let you attempt to go down," Joanna declared. "Before we are too far away we must walk back. The car will be as safe at the side of the road as are the others being abandoned."

"If we have to walk," Kenilworth replied firmly, "it will be straight ahead. I'll get you down if I have to carry you."

"But it's utter folly!" she protested. At that moment another group, two women and a man, stumbled by them, feeling their way back to the summit. "See,"

she exclaimed, "there are more who have given it up. We can walk back, dry out and wait for daylight. People below will understand."

He stubbornly negotiated another corner. When the car was crawling along again he spoke, grimly:

"There isn't enough charity in the whole world—in that part of it you and I inhabit—to make room for any sort of decent understanding of how a pretty woman might be caught and remain till daylight on La Turbie. You can stand a mysterious escapade in the night with Prince Michael, but not with me in the mist at a mountain top clubhouse where you have to wear a mask to save your face. Some could; with some it wouldn't matter; you couldn't and you count."

She bit her lip, and was silent. With a petulant gesture she brushed away the moisture that hung in great, glinting beads on her eyelashes. Suddenly she was startled by a light that appeared weirdly in the middle of the road almost at their front wheels, waving slowly to the right and left.

"Somebody smashed, I suppose," Kenilworth muttered and, jamming in his brakes, brought the car to a stop. Heavy, forbidding faces emerged from the fog on either side of them. Joanna cried out. Kenilworth, with an oath, lunged across her at the head of a man who reached in to her, but his arms were seized in an iron grip and twisted dexterously behind him. A guttural voice, speaking a mixture of Monegasque and French, commanded:

"Monsieur and Mademoiselle will be good enough to step from the car!"

"Like—!" Kenilworth exclaimed, and struggled, but the grip on his arms left him powerless. The lantern was brought closer. By its pale light they saw that a dozen men surrounded the car and that firearms gleamed dully in their hands.

After her first cry of alarm Joanna sat rigid. Something of her fright shone in her eyes, and Kenilworth was conscious that her face was pale. Otherwise she gave no sign. The gruff voice of the leader of the evil crew was heard again:

"It was ordered that you both descend. We have not great patience. The mademoiselle need not fear."

Kenilworth advised Joanna to step out quietly. "We must go through it, I suppose," he grumbled. "They probably will rob us with a threat and pardons and then politely let us go. These mountain brigands are thorough gentlemen as a rule."

The one who had been holding onto Joanna's wrists released them when she was in the road. She ran around the car to Kenilworth's side and from this position glared defiantly at the footpads who surrounded them. One of them caught the red sparkle of the enormous ruby that lay against her throat, from which her wrap had fallen. She instinctively flung up her hand to cover it. The bandit smiled and bowed gallantly. "A pretty thing, Mademoiselle," he said in the native patois, "Mademoiselle's neck does not require such an ornament, however!"

Kenilworth cursed at him, which only brought another ironic bow. The men closed in around the pair and they were ordered to walk with them. They were

marched off the road past a hut which Kenilworth recognized as the one before which the big car ahead of them for the first portion of their ascent, had stopped and dropped behind them. Behind the hut they entered a cluster of pine trees and then crossed an open space of soggy bush stub. A low barnlike building loomed out of the mist before them, and they were ushered through a narrow door.

Inside the building was a startling scene. In the dim light shed on a dozen lanterns placed about the earthen floor they saw half a dozen men and women whose costumes and dominoes proved them to have been revelers at the clubhouse, lined up against the walls, the men standing stiffly at one side, their hands bound behind them, the women in an excited group. Armed ruffians guarded the women at one side, and the sullen men at the other. Kenilworth was ordered to take his place among the men. For a brief moment he gave sign of attempting fight, but Joanna murmured a reassuring word to him and without awaiting the command from their captors, moved over to join the group of women.

As Kenilworth had prophesied, the bandits robbed their victims with profuse apologies uttered in their guttural tones. They seemed, however, to be strangely inefficient in their plundering. The man whose hands explored Kenilworth's inner pockets did not discover his wallet, in which was a sizable sheaf of bank notes, nor his platinum and diamond studded watch in the watch pocket beneath his waistcoat. A few gold louis, and an English pound note in his change pocket was confiscated. His pearl dress studs were not noticed.

Curiously, he observed that the other robbers, relieving the other men of obvious valuables, ignored costly pearl studs.

On the lapel of one victim, a tiny decoration built around a huge diamond, was unnoticed.

The same incongruous carelessness prevailed at the plundering of the women. Their fingers brushed lightly over gleaming throats; they begged a pardon for every jewel, of which they took only those that sparkled flagrantly. A pretty young woman—a very pretty young one with the small, angular face and smooth eyelids of an early madonna, dropped to her knees hysterically when a rough hand reached to a sapphire pendant which hung deep on a bare chest from which, in her excitement, she had almost torn the already scant reach of her gown. "Please," she pleaded to the bandit, "do not take my necklet. It is of small value. I have hidden diamonds that I will give you. My necklet is a reminder of my husband."

The evil fellow gave her his fingers and helped her to her feet. Then he bowed with a comic opera sweep of his wide brimmed hat. "I would not disturb the gift that reminds such a charming lady of something she should not forget," the bandit said. Joanna, who was standing near, glanced quickly at the common, vulgar fellow, whose breath was strong with garlic and whose hands were gross and awkward. Then she looked at the girl, and shuddered a little.

The brigand who appeared to be the leader of the robbing company, the one whose voice was particularly

gruff, stepped into the middle of the floor and announced:

"We are most sad to interfere with such plans as the messieurs and mesdames have made for their return to the more comfortable thresholds of their homes below, but there are circumstances which may not be avoided. It becomes a necessity to invite the gentlemen to remain within the hospitality of this isolated barn which we have borrowed for the evening. The ladies will be returned to the clubhouse, where they may be so happy as to find other partners for the merry dances of the waning night. You will be reunited with the morrow, doubtlessly. When the ladies are deposited at the clubhouse we shall leave you. Messieurs, the police will find us well disappeared by the time you gentlemen ease your wristlets and find your way to the cities below."

The men against the wall stirred and swore, but firearms menaced them. Some of the women blanched at the prospect of their doings of the night becoming wildly reported tidbits for the spicy enjoyments of sensation-mongers along the Riviera. The pretty girl who had protected the souvenir of her husband shrieked. An amused and ironical smile formed about the plebeian mouth of the bandit who had sensed her predicament—her sudden thought of the consequences of being detected by that same husband in her clandestine visit with another man than he to the clubhouse that is out of conventional bounds.

Despite all protests the women were herded out of the barn, escorted across the soggy open space, through

the pines and onto the road. There they were instructed to climb into a big gray car—Joanna thought she recognized it as the one they had passed on the road, but was not sure. A silent figure sat at the wheel; one who knew every trick of the road and picked his way surely through the mist to the final turn which revealed the dim lights of the clubhouse just ahead. Here the car stopped and the women were ordered to descend and proceed alone to the clubhouse. "The telephone wires have been cut," the man who had driven the car said to them when they were all in the road. "You may be prepared to wait until the mist lifts or your escorts find their way below and send for you."

With the reappearance of the hold-up victims, draggled and suffering from their various reflections upon becoming, as they surely would be, heroines of a widely-told-about night on La Turbie, pandemonium broke out among the revelers who had elected to remain and who, by that time, had made serious inroads upon their host's store of champagne. The sense of the reception of those who had thought it necessary to brave the mist for a return to their places below, by those who heeded such convention, was that each one of the robbers' victims had, by the unexpected circumstance, become "one of us."

Joanna sat apart from the ribald scene that immediately shaped it. She made no pretense of restoring her mask to her face—by now all masks were openly discarded. Even the mask that restrained the clubhouse itself had been dropped, and the revelry was unbridled.

Outside, after an hour, the big gray car which had disappeared after depositing the women slid up again to the parking yard and found a place to stand. This time Brandon, still muffled in his great-coat, got out, leaving Antoine, as he had earlier in the evening. He threw his coat back into the car, arranged his domino, and without his face mask, went directly into the house. He saw Joanna, alone at her isolated table and went directly up to her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TEST

WHEN the dominoed figure loomed at her table Joanna looked up, curiously. When she recognized the unmasked face she started. The relieved greeting she would have given anyone close to her, who might provide intimate companionship through the rest of such an exciting adventure, trembled for an instant on her tongue. But something in Brandon's face numbed her lips.

She rose to her feet, hand up, over her breast, with a faint recoil.

The fear that she had never shaken off crashed down upon her in a tumult—the unformed, unutterable fear that came to her when he first touched her fingers at the table across from Eggleston in the bank when she had written her first check against her mysterious money.

"You here!" she breathed: "I didn't know—have you been——?"

"I have only arrived," he said, his words suave but irritatingly ironic. "I am happy to find you—alone!"

Joanna knew, from his tone and his manner, that a climax threatened. A climax of some sort; something associated with the night, with her, with whatever Brandon had stood for in his relationship to her since that day in the bank.

Out on the dance floor, and at the tables near, she saw men and women looking at them curiously; at her, the Golden Girl whom everyone recognized, and for whom many eyebrows had been raised when she came in with the bedraggled troop that had been ushered back to the clubhouse by the brigands, and at Brandon. Her chin went up a little, and she braced herself inwardly.

"I am alone only by chance," she said, coolly. "I was here with Kenilworth. He has been——"

"I know," he broke in. "Some mountain bandits have taken charge of him and returned you here—so that everyone may know that for your private pleasures you choose a society and a surrounding that are, to say the least, suggestive of an unpleasant thing."

"That, of course, is what pleases you to discover. Why have you come?"

"I am here because of you," he said, shortly. "I am here to tell you, at last, that the play is over. As you have put your mask aside for the rest of the night, so your interesting little masquerade must be dropped. You came up here, I imagine, to color an amour. Instead you are about to discover—what you're made of."

She sank back into her chair. Her face blanched. Her brain ached with the knowledge of an animal that in some mysterious fashion it has been caught in a trap. Before he spoke again she laughed, a short, unmusical laugh, as if she were amused by the foolishness of her feeling, the utterly ridiculousness of it.

The laugh died abruptly and she watched the man

who still stood looking down at her unsmiling, ungracious, unconsiderate.

"I have a great deal to say to you," Brandon declared. He paused a moment, and then continued:

"There is a room—a small supper room, just off the balcony. If you do not object, may we talk—in that room?"

She got to her feet silently, and, when he had bowed his acknowledgment of her assent, walked with him to the circular stairway that led to the mezzanine. At the door of the private banquet room he stood aside that she might enter ahead of him. A waiter met him at the door.

"We shall not be served," Brandon said to the man, "but, as I shall leave the door open, perhaps you will stand near to discourage loitering on the balcony."

Joanna faced him when he stepped across the threshold.

"Don't spend your wits in skirmishing," she challenged him. "What is it?"

He ignored her challenge for a moment while he lighted a cigarette, first offering her his platinum case. When he had evened his light to his satisfaction he went to the fireplace and dropped the burnt match into it. For another moment he puffed calmly. Then he turned to face the girl, who leaned back against the table in the center of the room.

"Would you mind," he asked, softly, deliberately, "telling me what is your general impression of me? Not an analysis of my character, please, but an expression of the quality of your regard for me."

She replied without hesitation. "I have always distrusted you, but I have never been convinced that I was justified. If I hadn't feared you, I'd have liked you. As it is I am afraid I despise you, at times, because I know you are dishonest—dishonest with me, and with Yvonne, who loves you. Is that the answer you want?"

"Not exactly, but it will serve. Suppose I should ask you to become my wife?"

"You used to tell me that you might do that, some day. I've always had an answer ready. I'd never marry you because I could never love you. If I could love you I wouldn't marry you because, by all the laws of decency, you belong to Yvonne whom you allowed to love you before you decided to laugh at her for her pretension that she would be worthy of you."

He examined his cigarette flame, and then drew in its smoke.

"That establishes our position toward each other," he observed, and was silent for another interval. "But the situation is that you are going to marry me, nevertheless, because you will have to."

She swayed. Her slender white hand went to her throat again. She knew he was not talking idly. She had gone through one sort of battle—with Kenilworth; now, she sensed, she was at the beginning of another, and, in some unsuspected way, a more desperate one. She waited for him to go on.

He threw the cigarette into the fireplace and faced her across the table.

"Be pleased to understand the import of what I am

about to say," he breathed. "You have wondered where your money came from; you have wondered why it was given you. I am about to solve for you, at least, a portion of your mysteries.

"I control the source of your money, I guard its secret and its reason and its purpose. I am the one to whom you have made your accounting, the accounting you haven't known you were making in every whim, in every spendthrift mood, in every choice of the paths you have elected to follow! Your accounting has been fully made. It is totaled up—by me. I give you now, the results. I demand that you marry me. I do not say that I love you, for I do not. I do not say, even that I respect you for I despise you, as you have professed to despise me. I shudder before all that you stand for; the abortive pretenses of you, the sham of you, the deceit and cheapness of you! Yet I am saying to you that I want you to be my wife."

Joanna had stood as if transfixed. Her eyes widened. The brown deepened to black. The scarlet of her lips became ashen. Her hands were hot with the scalding riot of her blood. Through her brain rang the one phrase: "I am the one!" And in its wake all those other sentences, sharp and bitter, that emerged from his lips like the crashing of cannon on a battlefield, pierced her with the precision of a deadly fusillade. She collapsed into a chair and threw her hands before her eyes as if to shut out a vision.

But Brandon, moving over to her, went on cruelly, relentlessly:

"Of your enormous gift of money you have made a

farce. You have used it to enhance—not the world, not society, but the lure, the sense appeal, the woman of you. You have created nothing with your gift but love; the kind of love that thrills but is nothing of nobility. You have shown what the kind of girl you represent shall surely become if given rein. But the farce is over, as I said downstairs. The mystery of your money; more money will be given you, perhaps, if your money is dispelled—or you may count it as being dispelled. The other mystery, which must exist for a little while, is that despite the frailty of you, I want you to marry me. And if you do not, there will be no more money. All that you have will be taken from you—even tonight. Whatever is yours now gained by fraud must be surrendered. You will be—'Miss 27 of the silks' again, if your old job is still open to you! Are you, by any chance, still of the mind not to be my wife?"

The crumpled figure in the chair straightened a little. It tried to rise but sank down again. Its hands fluttered a bit. The girl looked up, at last.

"But I couldn't marry you! It could never be. I don't love you, I said. You wouldn't want me—without! You are playing with me."

"Not playing; very earnest, and final, and definite," he assured her. "As I said, that is the new mystery for you to be baffled by. As my wife you shall keep your money—more money will be given you, perhaps, and you shall, of course, share mine."

Now she gathered strength to stand. She made a little move as if to go up to him, but faltered. Her lips

moved as if she were praying for words—words that would save her money, save her dreams, save beauty and luxury and pearls and diamonds and priceless furs—save them and, at the same time, save herself. But whatever her prayers, she heard no echoes of an answer. She turned to go out the door. Brandon, the torturing smile playing, now, about his lips, watched her silently, coolly, unmoved.

At the door she hesitated, stood for a minute leaning against the casement looking down into the ribald scene on the dance floor that blurred into a whirling black pool with monsters swimming on the surface.

Suddenly the little body stiffened. A bit of the brown came back into the eyes. Something of the scarlet returned to the quivering lips. She swung around slowly and walked firmly back into the room until she stood so close to Brandon that her body was almost against his.

"I want to keep my money, Francis," she said, her voice quavering, but soft and ineffably pleading: "I couldn't do without it now. But I am very much in love with someone else. Very much in love, Francis. And it's the kind of love you would never understand. I don't understand it myself. Nor does he—the man, I mean, that I'm in love with. You'll be kind to me, won't you? You'll tell me why the money was given me? You'll tell me what I've done that's wrong, so that I shall not do it again? I'll be anything you say, if I may have my money, the money that has made life so beautiful—with money and my love!"

"Anything I say?"

Before his sudden thrusting back at her those pleading words, she shrank as if he had struck her. Dazed again she heard him saying: "You may have your love, my dear girl. I would not interfere with that. It's you I want, for reasons and purposes of my own; not your love. Your flesh will be sufficient. I know the one you mean; I know the man to whom you've given the love that neither you nor he understands. Give it. Let him have it. Take his in return if you can win it. Enjoy it as you please, with discretion, of course, in so far as public scandal is concerned. All of that shall be the bargain—a bargain of today! The morals of today, you know, and the conventions, are not what they were in the yesterday. You are not the girl of yesterday, nor your kind of love the sacrament that it used to be. I am asking you to be my wife—only. To give me yourself only. You may give your love where you want it to be received and take whatever pleases you in exchange. Surely you, who have played the game of lure, will not shrink before the flame your very essence kindles!"

Deep colors came and went across her face. She closed her eyes and then opened them slowly, to quickly shut them. For a moment she seemed about to collapse again, but instantly she recovered herself. When she held her eyes open there was fire in them.

"You mean," she said, "that I may marry you, but love someone else and invite him to love me and enjoy me? That if I do that, it will be—quite all right, with you, my husband? And that if I do all this, why, I may keep my money?"

"Just that!" he answered shortly, "your money, and your love!"

When she did not speak, at once, he went on with a merciless sneer:

"The man you are thinking of will not hesitate, I imagine, to take full advantage of such an arrangement. He has shown himself to be amenable to any kind of conditions. While we are here, tonight, he is kneeling before satin slippers that were never worn by your feet. You have not done with him as you would like to have done only because he was afraid to bind himself to you. Free him from that fear and offer him another way; and I fancy he will not be so elusive. Perhaps I might add that by giving me yourself, as my wife, mind you, you will not only retain your money, but you will solve the problem of retaining—him."

She stared into his eyes for a long time, then dropped into the chair. "Would you mind," she asked, "ordering me something to drink? My throat is parched."

Then she buried her head in her arms.

Without a word Brandon went to the door and signaled the waiter, who had remained on the balcony in the vicinity of the door. The man hurried away. Brandon returned to the chair and stood by the side of the limp form of the girl. He touched her body relentlessly. She put up her hand in mute appeal for him to be silent. He hesitated, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, went to the fireplace.

When the waiter brought in the champagne, with glasses arranged on the tray, Brandon signed to him to deposit the tray on the table, and waved him out of

the room. Joanna stirred and lifted herself to her feet by bracing against the table.

When she looked across at Brandon the quizzical smile that so many people had never understood hovered about her lips.

Brandon went at once to the table and reached for the champagne to open it.

Then he sank, noiselessly, to the floor.

Joanna stood over him and watched the crimson trickle from his forehead, the broken, jagged neck of the champagne bottle still clutched in the deadly grip of her hand.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLIGHT

DOWNSTAIRS they danced; danced and shouted witty, taunting, mocking things at each other. Long, twisting serpentines, thrown from dancer to dancer in carnival abandon, spread a rippling blanket of tawdry colors over the clubhouse floor. And Joanna gazed down—down upon the prostrate form that lay at her feet, the crimson still trickling in ghastly persistence from the white forehead.

After a little while she opened her fingers and the broken neck of the champagne bottle fell to the carpet. She closed her eyes and lifted her face, from which all the color had fled.

This was a pose Joanna had never struck before. It was one she'd never practiced. She'd never thought of anything quite like it. It was as if she wasn't posing at all—just holding her face toward heaven with her eyes closed as if afraid to contemplate the message that might be written there.

Then she went onto the balcony and closed the door behind her. She nodded to the waiter who stood nearby, flashing him an assuring smile that seemed to tell him she was enjoying herself tremendously and would be coming back in a moment.

Downstairs she skirted the dance floor and threaded

her way among the tables to the foyer. The red-coated attendant bowed to her. "It is still black outside, Mademoiselle," he said. "No one could get down, now. It will lift by morning, though."

"Just the same," she returned, "please to call for Mr. Brandon's car. I think he will have one parked in the yard."

The flunky would have protested but Joanna silenced him with an arrogant gesture. Muttering, he went onto the veranda, Joanna following him, and called to a knot of chauffeurs who stood in the mist-dulled glare of a powerful headlight discussing, no doubt, the affairs of their masters. None of these responded. He went then into the yard, and among the parked cars. He found the hunched shape of Antoine and spoke to him. Antoine, wondering, agreed that Monsieur Brandon was his patron.

"Very well then," the attendant commanded, "be so good as to bring your car to the entrance. Your master seems to be remaining. Mademoiselle, his young lady, apparently brings his order for you to take her down the mountain. You can't make it, of course, but that is his and her affair, not mine."

Antoine growled his doubts of such a situation. They were cut short by Joanna herself, who appeared suddenly at the side of the car in the wake of the doorman. "I do not desire to be taken down the mountain," she declared. "Your master, however, requires you, inside, at once. I am to await your return, with him perhaps, in the car. Please go at once."

Both Antoine and the servant were puzzled, but Jo-

anna brooked no tardiness in obeying her commands. To Antoine she repeated: "I bring your master's orders. Attend to them! The attendant here will show you the way to Mr. Brandon. He awaits you in the private room, on the balcony."

Still dubious about this sudden humor to expose him to possible identification by the maskers in the clubhouse Antoine descended from the car and stumbled along behind the other man. Joanna climbed into the seat he had vacated. When their two forms disappeared across the veranda she felt with her toe for the starter, found it, kicked it, and in another moment was guiding the gray car toward the gate. When she was safely through the gate she disappeared in the mist. The curious chauffeurs who had watched her maneuver heard the echo of her horn until it, too, was absorbed by the thick, opaque atmosphere. "That's the one they call the Golden Girl," one of the drivers explained to his companions. "Pity, isn't it, to see a young thing like her clear gone to the devil?"

Antoine, led at his request through kitchens and sculleries, was brought to the closed door on the balcony. The guardian waiter opened the door for him. Brandon's eyelids were beginning to quiver. The excitable waiter would have lunged out of the room with a cry of alarm but Antoine clutched him by the throat and smothered the sounds in it. "Quietly, my friend, quietly!" he grumbled. "There's something to hide here, not to advertise. Bring the proprietor, or his assistant, quietly."

At the end of an hour's patient ministrations behind

the locked door Brandon, stretched on a divan, held his eyes open and gazed around him. His first feebly uttered question was:

"Where's the girl? The Mademoiselle?"

The clubhouse director would have silenced Antoine's complaint that she had stolen his car, but the Monegasque would not be restrained. Through the bandages wound about Brandon's head something of a fleeting smile escaped. "It is just as well," he murmured. "Be of cheer, my good Antoine! I failed, but I fancy you and your men will be paid double for your little practice tonight."

"But she will give the alarm below!" the other exclaimed. "Before morning! After dawn it would be futile; we contemplated an alarm by dawn when the men got down. But not before. You did not keep her here—till dawn, as you agreed."

Again Brandon smiled weakly, and indicated the bandages. "She is to blame for that. But I do not think she will give an alarm. That will await the men you left in the barn. The police will not be concerned much, when you have returned to them the plunder you collected. When you have sent them that, you will be as I said—paid double."

The expression on the face of the clubhouse official who had heard the cryptic conversation began to show a gleam of understanding—a curious understanding of the hold-up which had sent the group of half hysterical women back to his hospitalities. Antoine noted and shifted, uneasily. Brandon, too, alert despite his pain, saw. He called the man to the couch.

"Do not be concerned by the little drama in the mist tonight," he said, between his laborious breathings. "Your patrons who were robbed will receive their valuables, I have reason to believe. They will be none the worse for their experience. They may not know of it, of course, but they played their parts tonight in a great adventure."

Meanwhile Joanna, her wrap unfastened again, her slim hands gripped to the wheel of the gray car, fought her way along the narrow road.

When she rounded a turn just above the village of La Turbie little pin points of light shone up. Far down, out over the sea, the lighthouse at the base of Cap Martin glowed like a far-away eye of the night. The mist was lifting before the threat of dawn. Beyond La Turbie the country, although chaotic, was visible. The lamps along the sea boulevards were discernible.

The thought of Kenilworth, still captive with the other men in the hidden barn of the bandits, bothered her for a moment. An impulse came to turn around and, with the road partially clear, now, feel her way back to the hut she was certain she would recognize. She could, she considered, pick up someone at La Turbie to help her awaken the countryside. She decided against this plan, however, settled back behind her wheel, and shot into high speed.

The grounds of Villa Amette were vapored by the rising dampness of the dissipating mist. A solitary light, near the entrance gate, gleamed timidly. As she guided the car along the winding road to the house

among the vague, gray shapes of the arbors and pergolas and pavilions which, in another few hours, were to be a blazing, fantastic background for her brilliant and lavish fête—the fête of the Golden Girl, and, also, her Swan Song! For Brandon had said, "I am the one!" and he said, too: "Whatever you have is to be taken from you. There shall be no more money!"

When she drew up in front of a side entrance to the villa she saw that the house itself was also dark. She considered whether or not to summon a servant with her horn, and decided to leave the car in the roadway and go in quietly. She ached for the aloneness of her room—the room which throned the great golden bed.

At the ponderous villa doors she was troubled by the thought that she had never found it necessary to carry any sort of key. Servants always awaited her return, but they had to be summoned by the bell. She tried the door, however, and found that it was unfastened. She closed it softly behind her and felt her way across a tiny reception room to a draped arch that opened into a seldom-used drawing room. Across this room would be the grand hall from which a stairway led to the upper floors. When she was almost up to the heavy, double drapes which hung in the arched door that penetrated the large room she stopped, suddenly. Between the curtains a line of light shone. She heard the murmur of voices. Convinced that it would be servants, awaiting her, perhaps, she pushed the curtains aside and stepped into the room. Then she stood, fascinated.

The voices swelled as the curtains parted. One of

them she recognized as Yvonne's; the other, John's. And at the far end of the room she saw them, before the gentle glow in the fireplace, the only illumination in the room. Yvonne, gorgeous and Circe-like, her sinuous body wrapped in the sense-destroying hues of rich, red Burgundy, her only ornaments dazzling diamonds that glistened like a myriad of consuming fires in the gentle firelight glow, leaned forward in a cushioned, gilded chair. And at her feet—at "satin slippers never worn by Joanna's feet," as Brandon had taunted her—was John!

For one brief instant the thing before her muddled and assumed a contorted shape. Then the smolder in the fireplace burst into a flame of hell, and died again into something that flared as a grotesque mockery. Joanna's wrap fell from her shoulders. Her little hands dug into her breasts, but gave the senseless body no pain. The little figure in black stood, then, utterly lost to every thought but of what she saw—and heard.

"I have never known love until now. All else has been just a chimera. It is you who have shown what love's glory is! Please, my wonderful dear, will you take me in—and comfort me?"

John's voice, that was; John! Passion and pleading and humility in it. All those nuances of adoration, submission, hope and prayer and yearning that Joanna had never heard in it.

Now, Yvonne's low, silvery cadences, infinitely sweet and—infinitely soothing:

"Are you content—will you be content—to accept from me the love that is the only kind that I may

give you? The love that has blossomed and withered so many, many times? Mine can never be a pure love, my friend. And I may never promise its constancy. It is the crown that you may wear only while you can defend and keep it. That is what is said of me, and my love, my dear, and I must not say to you that what is said is untrue. If we love, you and I, and if I give to you the portion I may spare you, you must be content. It can never be a holy love—there must always be something wanton in it. It must be the kind we take and put aside. Will that, then, satisfy you?"

He crept closer to her. She put her hands about his face—warm, mesmeric hands. Her rich, soft, round lips—lips that were a sign of all love-madness since the world began—went down to his. Then it was John's voice, again:

"There can be no other love as wonderful as you can give. In any way that I may have it, if it be pure or defiled, I want it!"

A scream, a torrent of them, a frenzy of them, surged to Joanna's lips—and halted there. It was Yvonne who rose, slowly, sinuously, gracefully, Joanna saw, as if it were some strange, fantastic symbol taking form at the rim of a distant horizon, a smile, a faintly lined, queer and flitting smile, at Yvonne's red lips. And John saw, and got to his feet, sense-dazed and marveling. Again that low, soft, silvery cadence of Yvonne:

"What a poor, damnable thing you are, my friend! Go preach, my dear. Preach to Joanna; preach to the heart and the soul and the wonders of her! Preach—but do it on your knees and take your text from the

lesson I've taken the trouble to give you. Tell her that you've learned, at last, that you're only make-believe—you and all your kind. Tell her that if she'll have you, you'll try to learn from her the sort of thing her kind can teach."

John's voice, then, but Joanna didn't hear. She stumbled blindly through the curtains.

CHAPTER XV

THE FETE

PUPPETS and manikins—puppets in conventional evening black that uniforms eager and blasé men alike, and the manikins of their joyous world in the peacock resplendence that levels the cheap and the superb; Pierrots and Columbines, eyes shining with the thrill of youth that crosses every threshold with merry speculation—in endless streams they drove from every reach of the Riviera to the gates of Villa Amette.

Beyond the gates the gardens and terraces, miniature lakes and fairylike structures in delicately pink stucco, were bathed in a dull silver flood of artificial moonlight. On the lakes tiny gondolas floated lazily, through waters rippled by dimly illuminated fountains that spouted faint perfumes.

Hidden somewhere in a bower of orange trees an orchestra played its lamentations and its ecstasies of summer-night passion. Tall palms, feathery topped, black and fantastic, made bowers around benches and tables; great stretches of the lawns had been carpeted with crush-blossoms—purple lilacs, rhododendrons, hyacinths and clematis. Now and then, from the branches of a pepper or fig or pine tree, some fascinated bird of semi-tropic plumage, too curious to seek its

nest, gazed down upon the scene with gem-bright, inquisitive eyes.

During the day the gates had been closed to all visitors. Only the workmen, caterers, electricians and the spluttering, queer-mannered men who herded troops of dancers and more nondescript performers, had been allowed to enter the grounds. There had been frantic efforts in many quarters to break through the barrier so firmly guarded by watchmen, but none had been successful. Even the telephone, except that line which reached the offices of the servants, had been shut off. So it was that even the intimates of Villa Amette, those who had watched the preparations from day to day, were utterly amazed at the splendor, the lavishness, the consummate artistry of the spectacle into which they strolled.

Teddy Dorminster, who had been one of those whose call during the day had been futile, stood amazed when, with his sister, Betty Weymouth, at his side, he turned about, on the highest terrace, to look over the sloping lawns. Betty exclaimed:

"Truly, an appropriate whim for a Golden Girl!"

"Daring, brilliant, extravagant!" Lord Teddy murmured. "But just the sort of thing we might expect—from her! It's not barbaric; there is nothing flaunting. It is a splash of countless money and magnificence, but a mellow splash. Somehow I can see a note of wistfulness in it all."

Betty Weymouth was silent a moment. Then she said:

"Do you know, Teddy, I think you're right. There's

something in this scene tonight, in this fête, that isn't mere extravagance; it's uncanny, I know, but I believe there's a sadness in it, some place."

"Yes. Like a beautiful woman! There's joy always but for someone, sadness, too!"

Betty looked at her brother quickly, and understandingly. The sadness he sensed would be for him—that the girl whose spirits were being given expression tonight was beyond his honest want of her. "Come!" Betty said. "This is no time to be sententious. There's Roddy Kenilworth, looking none the worse for that thrilling adventure he's rumored to have experienced last night with Joanna. Perhaps he'll tell us something. Nobody seems to know the straight of it."

Kenilworth, who frankly admitted that he was provoked by Joanna's refusal to hear from him during the day, treated the inquiries by Lord Teddy and Betty whimsically. "Whatever you've heard isn't true," he said. "And what's true isn't interesting. Just a comic opera hold-up, with something fishy about it. The Monaco police notified me today that all valuables taken by the bandits had been mysteriously delivered to them in a package with the terse suggestion that they be returned to their owners."

"But Joanna?" Betty Weymouth asked. "You should never have taken her up La Turbie, Roddy. There are ugly hints about."

Kenilworth ignored the probing. "It is ten o'clock already," he observed, "and neither she nor Yvonne

has appeared. Both of them have an admirable sense of the dramatic."

Footmen in scarlet and gold moved among the guests bearing trays on which cobwebby glasses and silver decanters clinked. Wines of Brittany, and the more sensuous fluids of Bordeaux flowed freely. A young débutante from America, one of those whom Joanna used to copy but who, now, planned long and earnestly to hit upon ways of copying her, exclaimed to her companion:

"It's like a scene in a stupendous movie only so different. A movie party is always so coarse and cheap. Here everything is on such a scale of splendor that it is romantic. There is so much wine and champagne about, but no one is silly."

On the carpet of flowers a troop of dancing girls from Cairo whirled into their rhythmic involutions, their sinuous bodies giving cadence to a mute language of love. An English countess whirled away on the mimosa bowered dance floor with a partner borrowed for the moment from a celebrated beauty from the chorus of the Folies Bergere. An Indian Prince, scornful of the rules of his caste, wrapped a spell with his somber black eyes about a gentle girl in satin and pearls. A Deputy of France discussed his wife with a Monte Carlo *mascotte* in whose saucy head reposed the secrets of many other wives.

Into this enchanted garden the Golden Girl walked at last, with Yvonne beside her. In no bit of her that the eye could discern was there a memory of the night before; of the bitter, disastrous hour in the little room

at the club house on La Turbie; of the desperate drive down the mountain, or of the scene at the fireplace with Yvonne and John as the actors. The poise of her was regal, arrogant. The crowd that watched the turn of her head, the shimmer of her gold-brown hair, the dancing of a thousand phantoms in her deep, brown eyes, saw only the pride and consciousness of her golden aura and her self-indulgence. It seemed to everyone in that gay crowd that when Joanna had looked upon them, had accepted greetings and expressions of wonder, she gave her brown-crowned head a merry toss and then plunged into the seething torrent her golden wand had conjured.

Kenilworth managed to reach her. He caught her hands and hurried into a cascade of questions about the outcome of the night after the bandit took her away, but she laughed at him. "I'll think and talk of no yesterday tonight, Roddy," she bantered. "I'm living now just for the hour. Everyone who dislikes me; everyone who scorns me; everyone who loves me —is here tonight. Who knows? You may dance with me once—a waltz, I think, Roddy. You may hold me close. I want everyone to hold me close, tonight! But you mustn't talk—of anything except of me just as I am tonight. Come!"

She led him to the nearest dance space. At every vision of her, wherever she went, orchestras burst into their melodies. She stopped the band that had essayed a fox trot and ordered a waltz, and danced it silently with Kenilworth. When the music died she turned to another, waving her hand as she was swept away.

Dorminster also captured her for a fleeting minute. He found her standing at the side of one of the fairy pools, shut off from view by a cluster of columns which supported one of the arcs that spread the imitation moonlight. The little lake was one of those that were permanently part of the landscape scheme of the grounds, and the home of a group of swans. One of the majestic creatures, petulant at the noisy inroad upon accustomed hours of slumber, had approached the slender figure at the water's edge angrily, with a rasping protest. When it saw that the single form was that of its mistress it smoothed its wings and craned its neck toward her. She had offered it no crumb but it did not withdraw its outstretching head. Its bead-like eyes remained fixed upon her. The appearance of Dorminster, who had trailed her, drove the water bird away. Joanna turned on the newcomer.

"Why did you come, just then, Teddy?" she protested. "I think in another minute it would have sung. I've always wanted to know what a swan's song sounds like!"

"Then listen to me," he returned, gayly. "I'll make mine merry. I'm always singing when I'm with you, you know."

"Singing foolish roundelays, Teddy. Only foolish ones. You mustn't do that, now. I'll permit no one to be serious—or disconsolate."

He wanted to talk of himself, and of her. It was the subject he always fell upon, but she outwitted him easily. She was about to command him to take her back to her guests, when she was suddenly pale. Teddy

saw and looked about quickly. John had trailed her, too, and was coming up to them. Teddy knew the significance of that sudden paleness, and went away with a gayly easy word over his shoulder.

"I've tried to get to you all day," John exclaimed. He tried to reach for her but she eluded him.

"I have been busy," she explained, simply. "There's been so much to attend to—bills to be gathered up and put in a package before they're lost. And—other things to do. I've seen no one today."

"Will you give me time, Jo, to talk with you? I can't be frivolous like everyone else, tonight. I'm full of something that is different. It is something that is for you. Can't we have a half hour?"

"Some other time, John. Tomorrow or next week, perhaps. There's no room inside of me for anything but idle chatter. You may take me back to my guests."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"Tomorrow."

She let him have her hand for a moment, but withdrew it gently. Once or twice she stole a glance into his eyes and saw that they teemed with earnest things, just as his lips had spoken only inner anxieties. When they were about to move out of the shelter of the flower hung pillars he took her suddenly in his arms. She did not resist, but yielded to him limply. He felt no response in the slim little body and released her. He was conscious, though, that in that embrace he had said much that he wanted to say, and that she would understand. He was more content, then, to wait until the morrow.

The hours passed, gay, colorful hours, that were speeded by a continuous piling up of festival surprises. No grand duke in the old days had confounded his guests with a more stupendous program of sense entertainment. But always there is a climax to such affairs—such for instance as that time when an oriental potentate endowed his favorite companion, during a celebration on the Amette grounds, with a marvelous coat of emeralds. The guests of Joanna and Yvonne knew this time had arrived when, shortly after two o'clock, when the fragrance of mimosa was heaviest, the moonlight arcs were swung by invisible hands until their mellow glow was concentrated upon the long, low pavilion built behind the Trianon house. There had been a mystery about this pavilion that had whetted curiosities. During the earlier portion of the night it had been wrapped in darkness. Now it was bathed in brilliance, and a hitherto unheard orchestra was playing symphonic strains that contrasted strangely with the more accustomed jazz.

With shrill laughter and strident acclamations the guests swarmed down upon the lighted pavilion and surged between its columns into the little sea of seats provided for them before a stage draped by a quivering curtain of flower petals. When the guests all had found their way inside the pavilion the footmen and caterers began their task of gathering up the various paraphernalia of the night, and chauffeurs moved toward their waiting cars. Whatever was to transpire within the arbored pavilion, it would be the breaking up of the Golden Girl's fête.

Kenilworth and Yvonne walked together to the cluster of seats that had been reserved for Joanna and her closest intimates. They saw that Teddy Dorminster, and Betty Weymouth, Prince Michael and others who would naturally be of their party, had found their places. Brandon's absence from the fête already had been commented upon. But both Kenilworth and Yvonne were curious when they saw that Joanna was not among her guests.

"More of mystery," Kenilworth observed. "Have you yet discovered what this personally arranged affair of hers is going to be?"

"She has guarded her secret tenaciously," Yvonne replied. "It has been the main thrill of her preparations—arranging something of which nobody but she has known anything. I have not tried to get her confidence."

They decided to look about for her, but Joanna just then came up. When Yvonne looked, suddenly, into her face, she started. The Golden Girl's eyes were shining. Yvonne sensed the tenseness of a suppressed excitement. She advanced to meet the girl, and stood with her a moment.

Stragglers brushed by them. They would have surrounded the two hostesses, but Joanna urged them all to join the crowd under the mimosa roof. When there was opportunity she took both of Yvonne's hands in hers.

"Whether my little climax is a success or a failure," she said, very softly, "or whatever happens—I want you to know, my dear, that I have understood many

things right along, and the best of them was—you and John."

She dropped the older girl's hands, then, and went toward the hidden door that led from the outer lawn onto the stage behind the flower curtain. Yvonne reached out to catch at her, but was too late. She stood, undetermined, until Kenilworth approached her. She went with him to their seats before the stage. As if their arrival were a signal the leader of the orchestra raised his baton. The lights were extinguished. The curtain of flower petals parted. There was deathly stillness, then, like the breaking of a great wave into surf a gasp swept up from the audience.

CHAPTER XVI

JOANNA

THE curtains spread upon vague shapes that took form in a phantasy that slowly emerged from a vapor of pale blue light. Out of a far background, admirably conjured by skilled artists, spires and domes and gabled roofs of a conglomerate city loomed. Illuminated windows shone dully. Miniature streets, crooked and narrow, came down out of the perspective and converged upon an open space before the invisible footlights—the painted city's market place.

In the center of the square a pillar rose, with a rim of water troughs at its base. Against this column, her head bowed, shoulders drooped and motionless body limp in a posture of despair, leaned an unknown girl, of some warm-pulsed type, her body gleaming white through a diaphanous drape—a girl who was fresh and young and lovely. Hunched before the youthful figure three old crones in the garb of witches swayed in rhythm with the plaintive song of the orchestra. In the hands of each a lantern swung, its flame shedding a dim, colored glow.

Even as the audience gasped at the weird symbolism of the picture—a vibrant, beautiful, unsullied girl hemmed in by evil witches—one of the old crones, one

whose lantern glowed in sickly yellow, rose and still swaying to the music, lifted her light so that its yellow rays bathed the body of the girl. Across the sky over the painted city in the background, great letters made by invisible lamps manipulated from behind the stage slowly took shape and, like a fantastic reflection, spelled the word—"MISUNDERSTANDING."

The letters died away. The second witch arose and danced before the girl against the pillar. The glimmer from her lantern bathed the white form in scarlet, and new letters glowed in the sky—"DISTRUST."

The guests stirred in their seats and settled again. The third witch danced and held aloft her light. The figure in the market place took on a hue of green. New letters formed—"ENVY."

Yvonne, who had stared fascinated at the unfolding of the tableau, suddenly was conscious of a breath on her bare shoulder. She looked around and peered into the fixed eyes of Brandon. Around his forehead a bandage shone white. He stood beside the vacant chair into which he had intended to drop quietly. Yvonne watched his lips and saw them frame the whispered words—the words he remembered as Joanna's plaint to Eggleston, long ago, in the somber library of the house on the Avenue when she told the banker of the three things that had haunted her in her coping with the problems of the girlhood of today—"Misunderstanding, Distrust and Envy."

Brandon was so tightly wrapped in the spell of his memory and this amazing reminder staged by Joanna with her troupe of actors and actresses especially

brought from Paris, that Yvonne reached back and touched him to bring him to a realization of his surroundings. He brushed his hand across his eyes and dropped into the vacant chair.

"I am just in time," he remarked, "to witness the sensation she arranged so secretly. I fancy it will be most interesting."

Yvonne studied him a moment and then turned back to the scene on the stage.

The three witches danced away into the background. Out of the crooked little streets of the make-believe city other shapes were coming down into the open space—fantastic shapes, with empty faces pallored white with chalk, ghastly, grotesque. On the small stage it seemed as if there was an army of them, the population of the city they sprung from.

Brandon started so violently that Yvonne and Kenilworth shot a glance at him. When they looked back upon the stage they saw why. Unquestionably he was among those grotesque figures, for one of them walked with exaggerated grace and his head was bandaged!

And just then, as if a common realization had swept over the men and women, the puppets and manikins, the Pierrots and Columbines in the audience, there was the sibilant sound of pent-up breath escaping hundreds of lips. Almost every one of those who had come to the revel of the Golden Girl recognized, in one of those weird, white-faced figures on the stage—himself or herself.

Betty Weymouth saw that Joanna had caricatured her. Prince Michael saw himself, as surely as Brandon

had recognized the graceful form in the bandage. John, who stood at the back of the pavilion saw a masque of himself. Everyone else saw something of his or her representation in the silent city's inhabitants as they trooped down into the market place around the semi-nude girl who leaned against the column in the center.

The girl raised her head and shook the long strands of her billowy corn-yellow hair. When she saw that the witches had faded away from her, and that she was among the people of the city—the people of the world in which she found herself—her slender body straightened. The orchestra burst into a joyous rhythm. The girl leaped into the throng of masques and danced among them—danced gayly, her filmy draperies flowing in utter abandon, revealing every tint and rounded curve of her young body.

"Watch the witches!" Brandon murmured. He spoke to himself, but Yvonne and Kenilworth nodded in acknowledgment that the thought had come to them, too.

A little company, in the masques of morose solemnity, assembled at one side of the stage. Up to them and around them the girl danced ecstatically. They swayed back and forth in time with the young feet that seemed to dance as if slippered with quicksilver. A wail of mournfulness crept into the music. The girl danced slowly, more heavily. The witch with the yellow lantern, "Misunderstanding," fell into step behind her. The girl shrank; relentlessly the evil witch pressed upon her. An eerie lamentation shrieked from

violins and reeds; slowly, mercilessly, "Misunderstanding" drove the lovely girl back to the pillar.

Again the dancer escaped her baleful guardians and moved merrily, hopefully, carelessly. She was driven back from the group that gathered around her, by "Envy." A third time she tried to spread her rhythmic doctrine of carefree youth and grace and vividness, and again——!

In the audience a woman uttered a half scream, half moan. Another woman rose to reach over to her. A man stood. In an instant the puppets and manikins, the Pierrots and Columbines were on their feet.

Many faces were as white as those of the mute characters on the stage. Now the three witches, all of them, were bearing down upon the girl who fought so valiantly to overcome the misunderstanding, the distrust, and the envy of those white-faced people, hypocritical people, who stifled her.

The music quickened. The girl, in a panic, sought to flee. The witches penned her in and drove her, step by step, while the silent masques circled and swayed monotonously, back to the water-trough post. The orchestra burst into a discordant crescendo. The dancer helpless, discouraged, backed against the pillar and flung out her arms in mute appeal. The witches raised their lanterns in hideous glee. The green, yellow and scarlet rays bathed the bared young body in a mellow glow. And by some weird trickery of a hidden electrician the rays from the lanterns of Misunderstanding, Distrust and Envy made a shadow against the city, a shadow black as night—the shadow of a cross.

This time it was Yvonne who whispered softly: "Crucified by those who don't know!"

With a common impulse Yvonne, Kenilworth and Dorminster, and, even, Betty Weymouth, made their way through the silent, thoughtful throng of departing guests, to the door that led onto the pavilion stage —the door through which Yvonne had seen Joanna disappear before the actors began their play. The director of the company of performers shook his head:

"Mademoiselle left with me the money to pay my troupe, and then went away," he said. "She was most generous, and we would speak more of our gratitude to her but she is not here."

John, his face as white as had been those of the actors, appeared out of the dark ground. He confronted Yvonne.

"We must find Brandon—quick!" he exclaimed. "She has gone. I went to the house to wait for her. I wanted to say—a great many things. Your butler told me she left, alone, in her car. There is a message, he says, for Brandon."

The horns of the automobiles in which the guests at Villa Amette were starting for their homes and their reflections upon the amazing climax with which the Golden Girl had revealed them to themselves, echoed up from the sea road. John, Kenilworth, Dorminster and Yvonne hurried to Joanna's little sitting room. Martha, Celeste and Marie, Joanna's maids, with wonder and shock in their faces, met them. Martha led Yvonne into the gorgeous bedroom and pointed to a glittering mass of jewels—every ornament from her

mistress' gem case, piled on the brocaded satin covering. In her hand Martha held an envelope. Her fingers shook as she handed it to Yvonne.

"She said it was for Mr. Brandon," the maid exclaimed. "And she said I was to say there would be nothing more—ever!" Martha lost her fight to keep back her tears and her eyes suddenly swam with them. "She's gone, ma'am!" she cried. "She said somebody was taking her money away from her because she was too old-fashioned inside."

* * * * *

One of the supremely modern young persons whose deft hands spread vari-colored weaves on the silk counter in the great department store called to her companions on either side of her:

"Watch your step, sweet children! 'Good Morning' is coming!"

Mr. Harkness, the buyer, sleek and self-sufficient as ever, murmured soft apologies as he edged his way through the crowds before the counter to summon, with his eyes, the counter girl with the shimmering gold brown hair. His manner was gentle, strangely respectful. His tone was almost deferential.

"You are to get your wraps, 'Miss 27.' That is to say, Miss Joanna. It is Mr. Graydon's request. You are to go in his car to this address on the Avenue."

He handed "Miss 27"—with her old number in her old job—the slip of paper on which he had written the directions given him by the "Old Man's" quiet secretary. When she read, the shadow came into her face, and something of dread. She had written a long,

very long letter to this same address, to Andrew Eggleston. She had hoped she'd never have to face him. But she turned away with a "thank you!" for "Good Morning," and went to get her cloak, and into the subway.

In the big, solemn library in the house of Andrew Eggleston, on the Avenue, where Joanna once had spent the long hours of an afternoon with the blueprint she had filched from John's rooms spread between her and the banker, a remarkable company was gathered.

Graydon, his gray face alight with tender excitement, repeated to a man of his kind who stood apart with him, the thing he had said over and over again to everyone in the room:

"And she came back, her skirts as scant as ever, her lips as red and her hair as imprudently short. If there was any change at all it was in her eyes. They were just as brown and shining but, somehow, they gave the impression that someone had looked very deep into them—into their very depths, perhaps.

"And she asked if she might have her job and her number, and gave me back her bank book—with nothing in it—and asked if I'd send it back to old Eggleston, here, and save her from seeing him. When I asked questions she said, simply: 'I learned a lot—that wasn't good to know. I want to forget it.' "

The man to whom Graydon talked went over to the table where Eggleston sat, his head set well down into his shoulders. Other men stood at the table too, important men they seemed, of the importance that is marked by large achievements. Among them was a noted sculp-

tor, and an artist, and two or three famous architects.

On the massive table, between them and the banker, and where John's blueprint once had been spread by Joanna, a glistening white model stood, the miniature of an imposing structure of great halls and marbled columns reaching upward to a gold dome. Above the dome a figure poised, a slender figure that seemed to imprison ineffable joyousness. The one who was a sculptor, one whose name is far-flung, passed his fingers lovingly over this delicate form destined, later, to be translated into marble. This part of the model was his handiwork. He was proud of its association with the monumental structure it was to embellish.

Eggleston, who had watched quietly, observed:

"That was her idea. She explained it to me across this table when she brought me the dream her young friend had been bothering her about. She said memorials ought to have life in them, instead of death." The banker chuckled, and the sternness in his eyes softened. "She said the usual kind of memorial always made her mad because they reminded her of so many people who weren't dead that ought to be."

Foreman, chief of the firm which had sponsored John, broke in:

"So it was she, after all, who conceived the soldier as always stirred to valor by the kiss of a girl—or of a woman who is still a girl to him? Yet you compelled me to get the conception across my desk to young Wilmore as if it were my own. He fought against it, for a time, but the grandeur of it came to him suddenly. Shall we tell him—today?"

"No," Eggleston replied. "It will be sufficient for him to learn, from us, that the money with which he has worked this model out, the funds that promoted his idealistic plan and translated his blueprinted dream into this step toward reality, came from her—that this was how she used the money I gave her but which remained so much a mystery to her."

After a brief pause the banker added, dryly:

"Whatever else there is for him to know I imagine she'll soon tell him—if she wants to."

Brandon, who was talking with Graydon, turned to meet Eggleston's eyes fixed on him with a quizzical expression in them. Brandon nodded:

"Yes," he observed, "she'll have many things to say to him, I fancy. For his sake I hope she doesn't say them—with a champagne bottle."

The ancient butler, whose years had flowed with those of his master, entered noiselessly and went up to the table.

"The young lady has arrived, sir," he announced.

There was instant stillness. All in the room looked inquiringly at the banker, who made a sign to Graydon. The butler went out. A moment later Joanna, suddenly startled by the faces turned toward her, was framed in the doorway. Graydon went up to her and took her hand gently and led her into the room. He announced to the company, simply:

"This is Joanna."

One by one the important-seeming men pressed upon her. Dazed, bewildered, fighting for some inkling of understanding, she heard the murmur of words—words,

words! Each man took her limp hand and pressed it and said to her—words! They congratulated her; they spoke earnest compliments; they uttered senseless things she couldn't fathom. And as each one bowed and left her he passed out of the room until, at last, there were only Graydon, Brandon and Eggleston.

At Brandon's lips she saw the old smile hovering—the old smile, but different. And she saw the same lights in Eggleston's eyes she used to detect in them when they sat across the table from each other.

"Please!" she pleaded. "What does it all mean?"

Brandon faced her.

"It means," he said, "that things are going to be straightened out. For me, the best it means is that you are to know that both you and I were playing a game—and that, because you won, that night on La Turbie when I had the bandits thrust you back into the clubhouse alone, nobody is happier than I."

He left the room then, with Graydon, and Joanna faced her banker. Eggleston rose and walked around the table to where she stood, still gripped in the spell of her bewilderment.

He led her to the fireplace and, taking her by the shoulders, turned her around so that she faced him. Above her the canvas image of the girl in the gold frame looked down. The banker went back to his chair at the table. For a long time neither spoke. Joanna stood almost motionless, her face deathly white. Eggleston gazed at her and she saw that his eyes wandered from her face to the painting over her head, and then back again. At last, he said:

"Your money, my dear, was from me. It was I who was your mysterious benefactor, and it was I who determined that there should be no conditions attached to your gift. I wanted to know how you—a girl of nowadays—would go; which way you would turn, if left to your own resources.

"It was because of a silly old man's romance—a romance of young days when, people have said, girls were different. The one in the painting above you was she to whom I gave my promise that I would make her happy and rich. She didn't live—even to marry me. So I've lived alone. The fortune came, but all that I've had of her is the memory in the painting there.

"I've a lot of money, my dear; so have all my relatives. I've had the whim, in late years, to leave a great deal of it to someone who can carry on, when I'm done, for the girl up there who has carried on with me. But I've never had confidence in any of you—any of you young people of these days. I admit I couldn't understand you. Your friend, and my friend, Graydon, told me I was a fool. He claimed to know you all—because he knew so many of you, in his store. He told me of you, of a 'Miss 27,' who, he said, recalled to him the painting over my fireplace. Well—that's about all. We decided to try you out—and we have. I thought it would cost me a million dollars. Instead I have profited. It has given me—if you will have it that way—you! I know, now, that you can carry on."

There was much more that Eggleston said; many things that quivered on his lips. Shadows and laughter and much of wonder moved in changing procession

across the deep brown eyes of the girl who crumpled at his feet. But the things he said were the useless, foolish things that people say when they have much to tell each other of themselves alone. When they spoke of anything else it was of the model on the table, and of how the money had been secretly spent at Joanna's request to make fulfillment of the promise of it.

Or of Brandon and Yvonne.

"In a way of his own planning, he only tested you, and it was with my encouragement," the banker said. "He, like me, was skeptical. He professed to know women. He admits he didn't know you at all. I kept from him the secret of your use of your money. I allowed him to test you to the end."

"That was why, then," Joanna observed, "he threw me into the companionship of Yvonne; I've known there was a reason. I've wondered over it. I think she knew, for I've always realized she was leading me up to things, showing them to me, and then saving me from them."

He nodded, gravely. "Yes," he mused; "I have the impression that one may be profoundly mistaken about many of the world's Yvonne Coutants."

Into the silence of the library the old butler intruded.

"Mr. Wilmore is here, sir."

Joanna, with a sudden catch at her breath, rose. For a moment she looked up into the face of the girl in the painting—the girl of yesterday.

"If you wouldn't mind," she said quietly, her face pale again, "I'd like to see him in here—alone!"

At the door Eggleston felt her hand on his arm. He

saw that the color had come back into her face, and that she was smiling up to him.

"It will be quite all right, won't it," she asked, brightly, "if I ask you to share me, with him?"

* * * * *

And that was Joanna; Joanna of the deep-brown eyes and the shimmering gold-brown hair; Joanna of the skirts too short and the lips too red and the tongue too pert. She is the girl next door, or, at the farthest, just across the street. Nothing more, and nothing less, than the modern girl.

THE END

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